

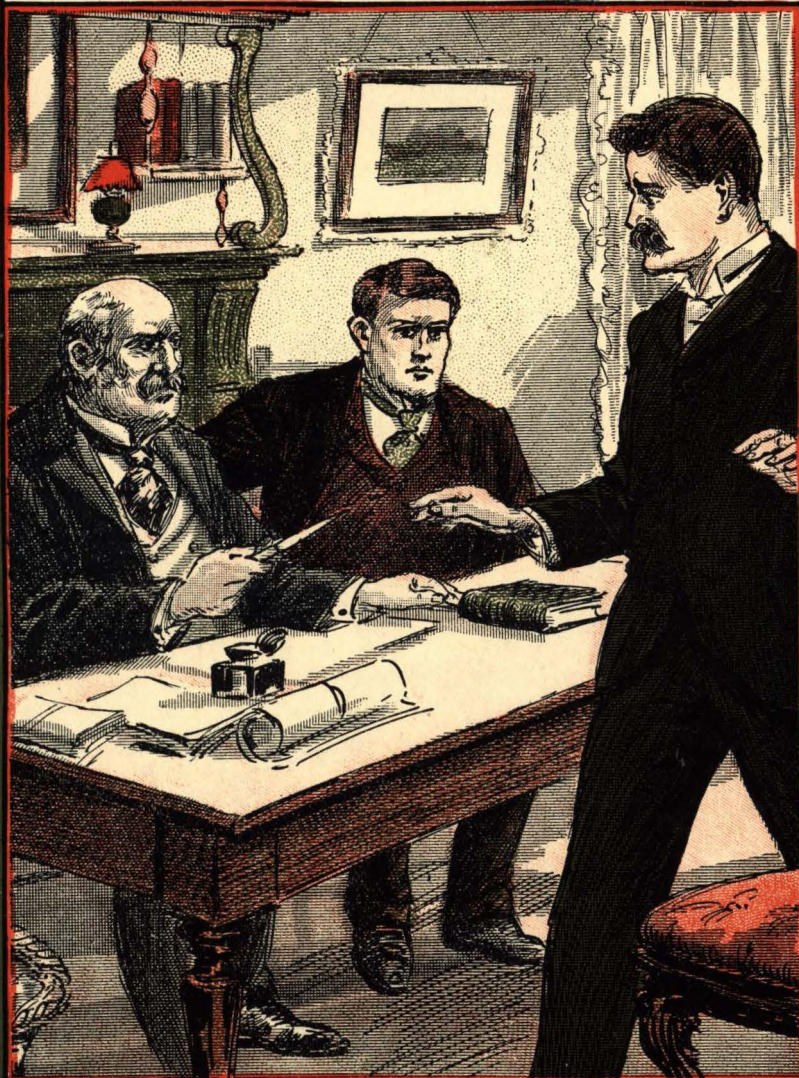
SHIELD WEEKLY

TRUE DETECTIVE STORIES • STRANGER THAN FICTION

THE MAN AND THE HOUR

or Sheridan Keene's Clever Artifice

BY ALDEN F. BRADSHAW



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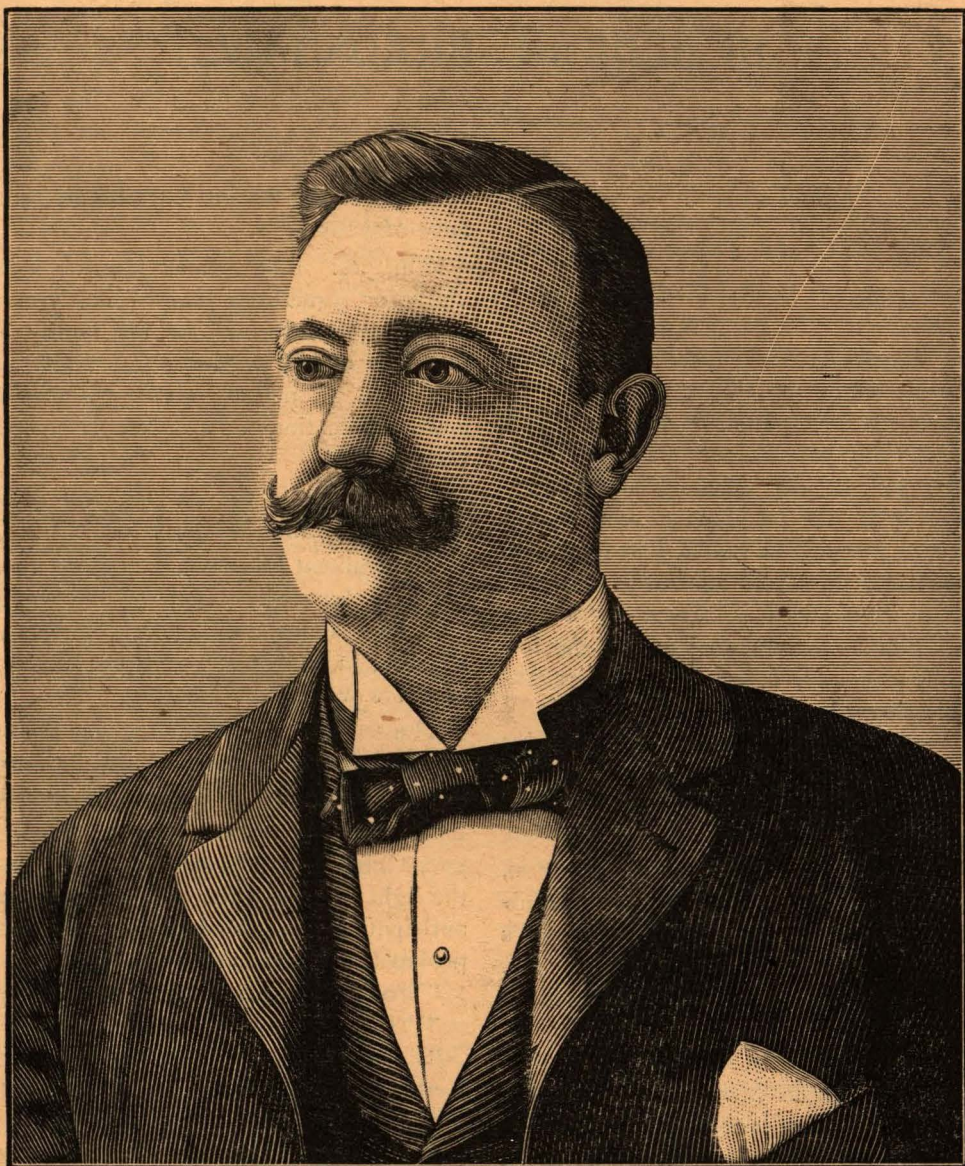
TRUE DETECTIVE STORIES • STRANGER THAN FICTION

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CHIEF INSPECTOR WATTS.

The head of the detective force of the city of Boston. He figures prominently in the SHIELD WEEKLY stories, and is well known throughout New England as one of the ablest and most efficient police officials in the United States.

The Man and the Hour;

OR,

SHERIDAN KEENE'S CLEVER ARTIFICE.

By ALDEN F. BRADSHAW.

CHAPTER I.

THE DEATH OF JACOB MOORE.

"Chief Inspector Watts, I want you to do me a favor."

Chief Watts met the request with a rather encouraging smile.

"I have not forgotten, Mr. French, that I am considerably your debtor in that line," he genially rejoined, with some significance.

"Well, it is not on that account, Chief Watts, that I appeal to you at just this time. I never charge up favors against my friends. But I am confronted just now by a case which, while I am still ignorant of the immediate particulars, I fear will require exceedingly shrewd and delicate handling."

The expression on the face of the chief inspector changed slightly.

"Is it a criminal case, Mr. French?" he asked, quietly.

"It is a case of murder, Chief Watts, or so, at least, it is here stated," replied Mr. Hamilton French, one the the brightest of Boston's legal lights and a noted criminal lawyer. "Here is a telegram I received less than ten minutes ago."

"Read it, please."

"It reads: 'Jacob Moore was murdered last night. Come at once.' It is signed by Moore's nephew, a man named Richard Thorpe, who has lived with Moore off and on since his boyhood."

"Who is this Moore? Is he an acquaintance of yours?"

"Oh, yes. I have been Moore's legal adviser for something like twenty years, and am so well informed of his family affairs that this crime, if Moore has actually been murdered, at once suggests to me possibilities and complications of a decidedly serious nature."

"And what is the service you desire of me?" asked Chief Watts, gravely.

The eminent lawyer, a man close upon sixty years, hurriedly consulted his watch. It was then about nine o'clock, a clear, cold morning in November, with the mercury out of doors well below freezing.

The scene of this interview was the private office of Chief Inspector Watts, in the headquarters building, in Pemberton Square.

"I will tell you why I have called upon you, Chief Watts," replied the lawyer. "In the light of facts already in my possession, I anticipate serious trouble from this case, if it proves to be of a nature reported."

"Trouble in getting at the truth?"

"Precisely."

"I see."

"Now, I want the help of a detective—a man of brains and energy, one who is capable of noting those obscure bits of evidence which escape the investigations of most men, and who, having discovered them, can ana-

lyze them and deduce the most probable conclusion."

"You want a rather clever man," laughed Chief Watts, in his agreeable way.

"I want a very clever man," returned the lawyer, pointedly. "As a matter of fact, Chief Watts, you are the man whose aid I would have liked to secure; but I am aware that your duties here make that impossible. Furthermore, this Moore lives out Lynn way, which is beyond the customary circle of your work."

"So it is, Mr. French."

"Can't you loan me just such a man as I have described, however—one to whom I can impart some of the inside facts of this case, and who will quietly investigate it for my special benefit. I apprehend some little bother from the regular force of constables and police, who persistently cling to their own methods and views; and I want the help of a man who will pull in the harness with me to some extent, at least, and whose features are not very generally known."

"You want him to do this work on the quiet, I take it."

"Precisely."

"Have you visited the scene of the murder?"

"No, not since the crime was committed, Chief Watts," replied the lawyer. "This message was the first intimation I had of it. I at once wired Thorpe that I would come out to the Moore place this morning, and asked him to stay active investigations until I arrived. I then came directly here to make the request stated."

"Which leads me to infer that you already suspect some person of the crime, assuming one to have been committed," said Chief Watts, looking up with a curious light in his eyes.

"Well, I will admit——"

"One moment, please. That's neither here nor there. I do not wish to anticipate the work of any of my men."

"Have you such a one as I described?" asked the lawyer, with manifest eagerness.

"A better one than you described, Mr. French," nodded the chief, with an expressive upward glance at the face of the attorney; "for he is a young man who has quali-

ties and abilities to which mere words cannot do justice. Moreover, if it is your wish, I will give him such assistance as may come in my way."

"It will be appreciated, I assure you."

"What is involved in this case, more than placing the crime where it belongs?"

"A considerable fortune."

"The Moore estate?"

"Precisely."

"When are you going down there?"

"The sooner the better. If you will grant the favor I have asked, I would like to take the next train."

"Do so by all means," said Chief Watts, rising. "Garratt, send Sheridan Keene in here!"

"Is he the officer to whom you referred?" asked the lawyer.

"Yes, he is."

"I think I have heard the name before."

"You will hear it many times again, if he decides to continue the work he has begun. He is a young man of extraordinary——"

But the sound of a firm step in the corridor, followed by the opening of the office door, led Chief Watts to suppress his complimentary utterances, and to turn, instead, to the person who entered—a tall, athletic young man, of about twenty-five years, with an erect and supple figure and noticeably refined and forceful face.

"Detective Keene, this is Mr. Hamilton French, the lawyer," said the chief, gravely. "He is a personal friend—one I would be glad to effectively serve, if it is possible. I wish you to undertake some special detective work at his solicitation."

A curious smile rose about the lips of Sheridan Keene, and he took the hand which Lawyer French extended.

"After the preface of Chief Watts," he said, with dry pleasantry, "I hardly need assure you, Mr. French, that I shall do the best I can for you. What is the nature of this work, sir?"

"One moment, gentlemen," interposed Chief Watts. "You have just about time to hit the half-past nine train. The sooner you reach the immediate scene of this tragedy, the better. I would suggest, Mr. French, that you start at once and give Detective Keene

any points you may desire during the journey."

"My idea, exactly!" exclaimed the lawyer. "Are you ready to go with me at once, Detective Keene?"

"I am always ready when duty calls," said Keene, laughing. Yet his response was true to the very letter.

"Good!" cried the lawyer, heartily. "Come, then! I have a coupé at the door."

Keene turned back, with only one swift glance at the expressive eyes of the chief inspector; then hastened through the corridor and overtook the attorney at the outer door.

CHAPTER II.

ON THE TRAIN.

Detective Keene and the attorney caught their train by a narrow margin only, and secured a seat somewhat aloof from the few other passengers in the smoking car. This partial seclusion evidently suited the lawyer, who appeared seriously disturbed by the news of his client's tragic death, and anxious to give Keene what information he could that would aid him in locating the criminal.

But the young detective checked him almost at the beginning.

"It is only a short run down there," said the lawyer. "I will give you all the points I can in the time allowed, that on your arrival you will be better equipped to look the evidence over. I think——"

"First, allow me just a word, Mr. French, if you will pardon the interruption," said Keene, turning his clear, grave eyes on the face of the attorney. "Whatever you may think, there is one thing I do not wish you to tell me."

"What is that, Mr. Keene?"

"You already suspect some person of this crime, and I prefer not to know whom."

"Well, well! You detectives are discerning fellows!" Mr. French exclaimed, smiling faintly. "Chief Watts drew the same inference, though from what I cannot imagine."

"That you engage the help of a special officer before you have verified your telegram, even, is to me a sufficient indication of your suspicion," Keene explained.

"Quite logical, too."

"You also fear that some innocent person may be to some extent complicated."

"That is true, also."

"The person," continued Keene, with a curious twinkle in his eyes, "is a young lady—one of whom you are very fond, and who regards you as a very dear friend. She is young, and, I should say, was quite recently married; but her husband is not a clever man, nor one of much stability, and is most likely——"

"Hold, hold! You will next be telling me what sort of a woman my grandmother was!" cried the attorney, who, in truth, was amazed at the acumen of the young detective. "How on earth did you guess these facts?"

"They are facts, then?"

"Precisely."

"I do not guess them," Keene laughed, lightly. "They are apparent through a very simple process of deduction."

"Will you tell me how?"

"Certainly! That the person you suspect may be guilty, is not the same person you fear may be implicated, is at once suggested by your haste in procuring the aid of a special detective. If the guilty one were likely to be involved, you would have at first examined the case more calmly."

"That is true enough," laughed the attorney. "But why do you infer my interest to be in a lady?"

"If it were a man, you would be less anxious to relieve him of what you fear may be a distressing situation. Men can face such things more easily than women," added Keene, significantly. "Moreover, that you take this very active interest indicates both that you are fond of her and that you know that she will expect you to do it, which indicates, in turn, that she relies upon you. This suggests inexperience, hence she probably is young. So serious a crime as murder very rarely involves a young single girl, however; hence she very likely has been recently married. But her husband is not a clever man, capable of handling so serious a situation, or you would have left this matter to him rather than plunging into it so hurriedly."

"Dear me! You should have been a lawyer. I cannot but admire——"

"Ah, but we waste time, Mr. French," said

Keene, quietly checking the lawyer's expressions of approval. "What I wish to avoid, sir, are the very suspicions by which you are actuated, and under which you are laboring. I do not want to know whom you suspect, nor why. These things only tend to draw a detective from the straight line of true detective work. I want only the bare facts, from which, and from my own observations of the evidence in the case, I may make unbiased deductions. This is the only reliable method of detective work. With a half-dozen visionary motives suggested to him, a detective becomes a weather vane. Who is this man Moore, sir?"

"He has been a client of mine for many years—more than twenty, I should say. He is a man of some considerable means, with an old country house out here a dozen miles or so."

"A married man?"

"He is a widower. He buried his wife a dozen or fifteen years ago. At one time he was some interested in farming, having no other business; but he gave that up also after his wife's death, and, by degrees, the last dozen years has grown into a rather sour and crabbed old man."

"A man of years, then?"

"Yes; Jacob Moore is about seventy years old."

"Any children?"

"Only one of his own—a girl named Mabel, now in the twenties, and who was married about a year ago to a man named Jeffrey. Besides this girl, Moore also has reared the son of a deceased sister. He is now a man of twenty-five and the Richard Thorpe who wired me the news of his uncle's death."

"Does Thorpe live with his uncle?"

"A portion of the time, though for the most part in Boston, where he is in the brokerage business."

"Does the daughter live at home?"

"No, not for a year or more," replied the lawyer. "And I now come to those painful circumstances which lead me to——"

"Never mind by what you are led," interposed Keene, smiling faintly. "Give me just the bare facts."

"They are these," nodded the lawyer, gravely. "Two years ago Jacob Moore took

it into his head that it would be well if his daughter were married to Thorpe, and the couple settled in the old home. Now, bear in mind that Jacob Moore was not a man to be easily turned from a project which he seriously favored. His proposition proved acceptable to his nephew, but not to his daughter. She flatly declared that she'd not even think of it."

"Which was very like a woman," laughed Keene.

"Whatever it may have been like," replied the lawyer, "the girl proved inflexible. The family broil, however, brought out the fact that she was in love with another, a man named Jeffrey, who is a carpenter by trade, and is said to be an honest and reliable fellow. I have seen him but once. If he is as good a man as he looks, I don't blame a girl for her choice."

"Did Mr. Moore give his consent to the girl's marriage to Jeffrey?" asked Keene, carelessly.

"Quite the contrary," said the lawyer, with significance. "He threatened to disown the girl if she married him, which, with a will quite as strong as that of the old man himself, she speedily did. As a result, there has been a total estrangement of the two ever since."

"Has the girl always been so headstrong?"

"She has always been dutiful, as I have observed her, and to my way of thinking was so in this matter. Her final determination resulted not only from a genuine love for Jeffrey, but also from the fact that he had recently buried his mother, by whose death he was left alone in the world. He had, however, a comfortable house, with several acres of arable land. To make a long story short, Mabel Moore, despite her father's bitter opposition, married Jeffrey and went to live with him."

"This was about a year ago?"

"Just about," nodded the lawyer. "Since then Moore has been more morose and crabbed than ever. He has refused to recognize either his daughter or her husband, and even young Thorpe has scarce been able to endure him. As his solicitor, I have occasionally been out to see him, and was always

glad to return. A more surly and perverse old codger could not be imagined."

"Has he made a will?" inquired Keene.

"Yes."

"Disinheriting his daughter?"

"Yes."

"Who is his residuary legatee?"

"His nephew."

"Does Thorpe know of this will?"

"I think not," replied Mr. French. "In fact, I am quite sure of it, for the will is in my possession, and Moore was not a man to have disclosed his intentions."

"Who witnessed the document?"

"Two of my clerks, and it was drafted and executed in my own office. I am very sure that the existence of this will is not known to Thorpe nor to Mabel Jeffrey."

"What's the value of the estate?"

"Something like fifty thousand dollars."

"Who has been living with Moore?"

"His housekeeper is a middle-aged English woman named Haynie, who has been in his employ since his wife died. He keeps one man, also, who works about the farm and stable. These, with Thorpe, are the only members of his household."

"Thorpe has not been there much, you say?"

"Only at intervals. I think he has not found the old man congenial, and his persistent absence, which has rather offended Moore, further convinces me that Thorpe knows nothing about the will in his favor."

"That is a very reasonable inference," admitted the detective, "and, possibly, does away with a motive. Is Thorpe a man of good character?"

"Yes, and is very generally liked. At the time of Mabel's marriage he made great efforts to induce her father's forgiveness; but, Heaven preserve him! One might as well have pleaded to a stone wall. Jacob Moore was as harsh and inflexible as—ah! here is the station! Thorpe will probably send the carriage for us."

The train was slowing down. The lawyer arose while speaking and began to put on his overcoat. Sheridan Keene restrained him in the aisle for a moment, and said, inquiringly:

"So far as you know, then, these are the bare facts?"

"Yes," said the lawyer, quickly. "Do you make anything of them?"

"Nothing at all, sir. It is too early in the game. One word more!"

"Well?"

"Introduce me here as a clerk from your office, not as a detective!"

"I understand."

"And take no notice of what I may say and do."

"Rely on my discretion!" nodded Mr. French, approvingly, as they approached the door of the car.

CHAPTER III.

CONSTABLE BRAGG.

It had turned ten o'clock. Though the sun was now well up and the sky cloudless, the air continued biting cold and the ground was frozen hard.

It was a branch station at which the two men alighted, and only a single carriage stood at the narrow platform.

More than a mile away, across a dismal sweep of moorland and marshes, could be seen the blue waters of the broad Atlantic, broken by the grim, dark rocks of the peninsula of Nahant. Somewhat nearer was the desolate, gray turnpike making east to the cities of Lynn and Salem. It was the highway of old, colonial days, and still was nearly as dreary and void of dwellings as of yore.

In the immediate neighborhood, even, the houses were few and far between, and the surrounding country was rough and hilly, interspersed with farms and wide stretches of woodland.

As the lawyer alighted from the train a short, thick-set man approached him. His grim face was not prepossessing, and he was glad in a rough gray suit, with his pants tucked in at the top of a pair of heavy cow-hide boots, which were soiled with mud.

"Be you Mr. French?" he asked, bluntly, peering sharply at the lawyer from under his bushy brows.

"Yes," was the reply. "Who are you?"

"I'm Darbage, sir—Joe Darbage," and now the fellow touched his woollen cap.

"I'm the stable hand up to the house yonder, and Mr. Thorpe sent me down here to get you. He said you might come by this train. Bad business, this, sir!"

"I see," nodded the lawyer, who had not recognized the fellow as Moore's groom and gardener. "Will there be room for my clerk, also?"

"Aye, sir, I reckon so. Tumble in, and I'll squat in the middle."

With no observable interest in the bumpkin, yet who did not quite impress him as a thoroughbred countryman, Sheridan Keene followed the lawyer into the wagon and suffered Mr. Darbage to squeeze his broad hips between them.

"I'd a come with the carry-all if I'd knowed there were two o' you," he explained, with a side glance at the face of the detective. "Get up! G'lang!"

"I brought a clerk, thinking I might need him," said Mr. French, as the vehicle rattled over the rough road.

"I reckon there'll be room enough, now the old man's gone," returned Darbage, irreverently. "There wa'n't room for no extras, though, when he was alive."

"Then old Jacob is really dead, is he?"

"Aye, sir, as dead as he'll ever be in this world. Can't say what he'll come to in the next."

"Well, this world is the one we have most to do with while in it," said the lawyer, with some austerity. "What are the particulars? I have only Mr. Thorpe's telegram saying Jacob had been murdered."

Darbage looked up without a change of countenance.

"Aye, sir, he was murdered right enough," said he, in his grim fashion. "Ma'am Haynie found him dead in bed this morning, with two knife-slits atween his ribs, and most of his blood run out of his body, which wasn't much at that."

"Is it known when the crime was committed?"

"I reckon not, sir, though I'm not sartin. Jim Bragg, the constable, is up there nosing round and looking as wise as an owl; but I can't say what he's larned. They don't tell me much."

"Is Mr. Thorpe at the house?"

"Aye, sir; he's been down here nigh a week."

"Isn't that quite a long visit for him?"

"The ole man ain't been over well, so Mr. Thorpe stayed on his account."

"And Mabel?"

"Mr. Thorpe sent her word this morning, and she came right up. Fust time she'd been in the house since the ole man kicked her out. I reckon there's the coroner driving in, sir. I heerd 'em say they'd sent for him."

The ride from the station had been of brief duration, and they now came in view of a large country house, situated somewhat off the road. A glance at the place indicated the character of its late owner. The dwelling, once a mansion, was now out of repair; and the surrounding acres of woodland and meadows had run rank as they pleased.

A large stable was at the rear and at one side of the house, and the faded old gray mare, behind which Jacob Moore had been wont to ride, ambled up the driveway between the elms as if eager to reach her stall.

But grim Mr. Darbage drew her down at the side door of the house, which was immediately opened by a young woman in dark attire, whose pale, pretty face and red eyes at once suggested to Keene her identity.

"Oh, Mr. French!" she exclaimed, approaching with much emotion to greet him; "I am so glad you have come! My poor father has met with——"

But the kind old lawyer took her in his arms, and silenced her with a more loving kiss than the father mentioned had ever given her in all her worthy and gentle girlhood. He led her in, and took her alone to the library; while Sheridan Keene, already at work on the case in his quiet way, followed them as far as the broad hall.

Though things wore the aspect of years of service, the large house was comfortably furnished, and the general cleanliness and order suggested the care of a capable house-keeper.

The sound of voices from a room off one side of the hall now reached the detective's ears, and in an affair of this kind Sheridan Keene did not stand upon ceremony. He at once approached the room, the door of which stood partly open.

It was a large, square bedroom, with two windows. A broad fireplace was at one end, but the half-burned logs were cold and dead, and the air was very chilly. A bed occupied the opposite end of the room, and there, upon its blood-stained linen, stiff and cold in death, lay the figure of a thin-faced, gray-haired old man, whose face in death, even, still carried an expression of that severity and hardness which had marked all the latter years of his life.

Three men were standing near the bed, and one, evidently a physician, was examining the body.

"The man has been dead many hours, not less than twelve, I should say," he observed, as Sheridan Keene stepped softly into the room. "It is a shocking crime!"

"Can anything be done?" asked a tall, broad-shouldered young man at his elbow.

The physician shook his head.

"Not for him," he replied. "You had better do nothing here, Mr. Thorpe, until after the arrival of the coroner."

Sheridan Keene looked the latter over. He was a well-built man of twenty-five, this nephew of the deceased. He had a frank and rather attractive face, with dark eyes and hair, and was the style of a man most women would have fancied, despite Mabel Moore's evident aversion to marrying him. His features were pale now, and his manner gravely composed.

"I have already sent for the coroner, doctor," he replied.

"Let everything remain as it is, then, until he comes."

"He should be here now."

"It is a case, I think," added the physician, "which will require capable investigation. Would it not be well to send into Boston for a competent detective?"

"I have sent for Lawyer French, my uncle's solicitor," replied Thorpe, "and I shall place matters entirely in his hands on his arrival. I think that would be my uncle's own wish if he were alive, instead of lying there, the victim of perfidious cowardice and foul play; and I shall be governed accordingly. I think I had better—beg pardon, sir! Who are you?"

He had turned slightly, and now observed

Sheridan Keene standing just within the threshold.

The detective approached with a grave bow, and without a glance at the grewsome figure on the bed.

"My name is Keene, and I am Mr. French's clerk," he explained, politely. "I have just arrived with the attorney."

"Oh, yes. Excuse me!" cried Thorpe, quickly offering his hand. "Where is Mr. French?"

"He is in the library with Mrs. Jeffrey."

"I must see him at once!"

"Oh, by the way," and Thorpe quickly turned back, "this is Dr. Carr, our local physician, Mr. Keene, and this is Mr. Bragg, the constable. They will give you any information you may desire, and I shall now request Mr. French to take entire charge of this dreadful affair. He will know all about the law bearing upon it, of which I know nothing. You will excuse me, won't you?"

The detective bowed and gravely acknowledged the introduction to the two men remaining, while Richard Thorpe hurried from the room to seek the attorney.

Sheridan Keene sized up at a glance the two men left in his company.

The physician was an ordinary old gentleman, and presented nothing of interest. Not so, however, the other.

Jim Bragg was a burly man, with coal black eyes and a bushy beard. He was a capital fellow for battering down a door and entering a dive of lawless ruffians, where indomitable courage was an absolute requisite; for such an occasion, you would have to go far to find Jim Bragg's better. But the ferreting out of a cunning, well-wrought piece of knavery was utterly beyond Mr. Bragg's ability.

But Mr. Bragg did not think so. All he wanted, or had ever wanted, as he said, was an opportunity. And it now had happened, like a long-awaited dream, when the news of Jacob Moore's murder was published that morning; and as he left his own home and hastened across the meadows toward the immediate scene of the tragedy, his mind, stimulated by the occasion, was filled with vague visions of startling stories in the city dailies, with the name of Detective Bragg in scare-

head letters and thrilling depiction of the marvelous deeds of this new Vidocq, to say nothing of renown handed down to posterity, and the probable demand for his immediate services in Pemberton Square.

This was the man to whom Sheridan Keene now turned, with a glance that at once took in the constable's chief characteristics.

CHAPTER IV.

DETECTIVE KEENE MAKES AN IMPRESSION.

Richard Thorpe's immediate cordiality toward Keene, when informed of his relations with the attorney, did not escape the notice of the burly constable, whose conduct presently indicated that he not only regarded Thorpe very favorably but was also inclined to extend this sentiment even to the latter's friends. He winked affably to Keene, as Thorpe hastened from the room, then turned to growl in the face of the innocent physician.

"Send to town for a detective, eh? Carr, you infernal sawbones, don't you think I'm equal to getting at the bottom o' this affair?"

"Why, yes, Mr. Bragg," stammered the startled physician; "but I made the suggestion only——"

"It was a cursed innuendo, no matter what 'twas made for!" protested the doughty constable. "Looking arter crime and criminals is my bread and butter, Dr. Carr, the which I'll not let you nor any other bone-setter whip from 'tween my teeth. Now, you look arter your end o' this case, and don't trouble mine, or the trouble'll not end there. Send to town for a detective! The blamed old meddler!"

"Some folks don't know a clever man when they see one," said Keene, in tones disparaging the perturbed little physician, who had beaten a hasty retreat from the room, and from the ire of the bustling, black-bearded constable.

"Too true for a joke, Mr. Keene!" cried Bragg, with an emphatic head-shake. "Some men are blind, and some are jealous; but I never saw a sawbones who wa'n't a blamed fool."

"It's owing to their business," assented Keene, with an object.

"So 'tis, sir! For cleverness, give me a lawyer, or a detective, or a politician, or even a gospel-sharp! But a sawbones——" and the disgruntled Bragg spat his disgust into the fireplace; "a sawbones ain't nothing! Nothing at all!"

"Not even worthy of contempt, eh?" smiled Keene. "You are the constable, I believe Mr. Thorpe said."

"Aye, sir, I am!" Mr. Bragg readily allowed. "Mr. Thorpe put it dead right, as he always does."

"He appears to be a nice, gentlemanly fellow," observed Keene, in a friendly way.

"More'n that, sir, he is!" declared the garrulous constable, with emphasis. "A cleaner, nicer man than Dick Thorpe never stood in leather. He hasn't a foe in these 'ere parts. Even that old man, stiff and stark there, was his friend—and whoever could win old Jacob Moore's favor, sir, could win any man's! I know, 'cause I know 'em all, root and branch. You're a lawyer, ain't you?"

"Yes, Constable Bragg," affably nodded Keene, careful to give this pretentious officer all the distinction possible. "Our Mr. French has always been Moore's legal adviser, and we shall now execute his estate—and possibly his assassins."

"Cleverly put—very!" chuckled Mr. Bragg, clapping the detective on the shoulder. "And seeing's your interest runs with mine, I'll not mind helping you, when I can."

"Then you'll not object to my looking over the evidence with you, merely as an assistant?"

"Sure not!"

"I'll keep mum, understand! Of course I don't expect to see all you'll see, for detective work is not in my line; but what little I get may help Mr. French in conducting the case. And say!"

"Well, sir?"

Keene slipped his hand through the constable's brawny arm and drew him closer, to add confidentially:

"If you can make a hit in ferreting out the truth here, there'd be a big opening elsewhere for a man of your measure."

"D'ye think so?" was the eager inquiry.

"I know so! Furthermore, since you're inclined to do me a turn, I'd like to reciprocate some day. Our law firm, you know, stands ace high with Chief Watts, of the Boston inspectors; and if it comes right, we can make a strong pull for you at Headquarters."

"And you'll do it?"

"With pleasure!"

"Put it there!" said Mr. Bragg, thrusting out his huge hand. "As for this case, what I get you get. But that's between us, mind you!"

"My word upon it, I'll do nothing to get in your way."

"That's good enough for me, sir!"

Thus Sheridan Keene made an impression, and paved the way to securing information from the one man who, his own detective instinct told him, would know more of the superficial features of this tragedy than all the rest of the community combined.

"Was this Moore's desk?" he now carelessly asked, turning to a piece of furniture near one of the windows.

"Yes, sir, 'twas."

"It is much disturbed. Was he in the habit of keeping money in it?"

"I reckon not. But some one went through it last night, that's plain. Most likely a search for papers."

"Possibly a will."

"My idea exactly. Say, you're tolerably clever, yourself! Well, I'll gamble I can name who did it."

"I hope so. If you can, it will be one feather in your cap."

"I'll have many in it afore this case is ended. Come down this way, and I'll show you something more. But this is between us, mind you!"

"If you doubt me, keep it to yourself."

"Oh, no, I'll trust you! I can read a man's face, and don't you forget it."

At the heels of the burly constable, who was that common type of man whose eagerness to serve himself makes him the cat's-paw of his superiors, Sheridan Keene followed through the dim hall and down a back stairway, and entered a basement laundry. From the single window a part of one pane was missing, making the room easy of access

from without; and upon the plank floor, extending from the window towards the entry door, were several marks of muddy boots.

"D'ye see that, and them?" triumphantly demanded Mr. Bragg, pointing first to the window and then the floor. "It came cold late last night, and the ground was soft in the early evening. The sawbones says Moore was killed before midnight. The party who entered that window, and stole out here and upstairs, was the party who searched the desk and most likely did the rest of the job. It was done in the evening."

"By Jove! I believe you've struck the trail, constable!" said Keene, admiringly.

"I know I've struck it!" declared Mr. Bragg, with a twitch of his bushy beard. "Now come outside here!"

He led the way through the entry and out of a narrow back door, and thence around to one side of the house. The soil of a flower bed under the windows of Moore's chamber was then frozen hard. But in several places among the dead plants and vines, were the clearly defined footprints of a man's heavy boots; deeper here and there, as if he had at times stood on tip-toe to reach the height of the window and peer into the room.

"What d'ye say to that?" demanded Mr. Bragg.

"I'll say nothing, till you see fit to do so!" said Keene, significantly.

"Good for you!" nodded the constable, approvingly. "Now, let's return by the front door."

"Wait a moment, constable," said Sheridan Keene. "I'd like a little more light on this affair, if you don't mind. Who discovered the crime?"

Mr. Bragg demurred for a moment, but visions of an appointment under Chief Watts led him to respond to the request. He had lost sight of the provisions under which the promise of influence had been made.

"The housekeeper, Mrs. Haynie," he replied.

"At what hour, do you know?"

"Nigh half-past eight."

"Did she give the alarm?"

"She ran to one of the neighbors, a piece up the road here, scared half out of her wits.

One of 'em came down here at once, and one went to tell Thorpe at the turnpike tavern, half a mile away. Dick mounted his horse and struck around to my house to notify me, in which he showed his good sense; and we came up here together. Then he sent the telegram to Mr. French, and word to Mabel Jeffrey."

"Then Mr. Thorpe was not at home here last night?"

"No, he wasn't," said Mr. Bragg, glibly. "He was at the road-house all night. Leastwise, he was with Mabel part of the evening waiting to see her husband. He's been trying, you see, to fix up things between them and the old man. But Bob Jeffrey didn't show up till midnight. Dick had dropped into the road-house for a drink, and joined in a game of cards.

"Has this been a habit of Thorpe?"

"Playing cards there? Oh, yes, regular thing. Genial fellow, Dick—and everybody likes him. It came cold soon after midnight, and his mare, being under cover, he didn't like to expose her. She'd been sick for a week back, and that was her first time out. So he stayed at the tavern until morning."

"I see," nodded Keene. "Then Mrs. Haynie and the stable man were here alone all night?"

"That's about the size of it. Darbage was at the tavern, and he stayed there until day-break, when he came up here and slept in the stable, for fear the old man would hear him enter the house. He was some slued, I reckon; but, Lord save us, Moore was past hearing long afore that. Joe Darbage might just as well have tumbled into his own bed."

"Do you know who last saw Mr. Moore alive, constable?" inquired Keene, who had received with a series of little nods the information thus far imparted.

"Mrs. Haynie was the last who saw him."

"Do you know at what time?"

"About nine o'clock last night."

"Was he up?"

"No, he was in bed. She went in to look to his fire, and to see if he was all right."

"That was after Thorpe and the stable man went to the road-house, was it?"

"Long after! Thorpe left here about seven o'clock, and Joe went a little later. Lord,

sir, nobody will ever think of suspecting either of them! But there's a sartin man who don't stand so well here, and some things p'int strong agin him," Mr. Bragg added, in lower tones. "Now, this is all atween us, mind you."

"You can depend upon me, constable," said Keene, assuringly. "This information will not go any further than to Mr. French. It will be of great help to him in the case, and we'll not forget it. What man do you mean?"

"Young Bob Jeffrey," whispered Mr. Bragg, with mysterious significance.

"You mean Mabel's husband?"

"Sure thing! Since their marriage he has been dead nuts agin the old man, and talks pretty rough agin him. More'n that, sir, he's been drinking more'n is good for him, and using his tongue too freely. I reckon he'll have a hard time telling where he was till midnight last night."

"What sort of a man is this Jeffrey?"

"Well, sir, he's a hot-headed—say, there's the coroner, now! I'll have to quit you right here, sir, for I've a word for him alone."

"Many thanks for this, however, Constable Bragg," said Keene, extending his hand.

"That's all right, lawyer!" exclaimed Mr. Bragg, with a growl of friendly appreciation. "But all this is atween us, mind you."

"I will not forget it."

"And I reckon I can let you into something more a little later. Leave it to me."

And the burly constable wiped the frozen moisture from his bushy black mustache and beard, and hustled around the corner of the house.

CHAPTER V.

THE MOVEMENTS OF MR. BRAGG.

The disclosures confidentially made by the constable opened up the case in a new light for Sheridan Keene, and the realization that its solution might prove difficult but added zest to his interest. It was plain that Bragg suspected Bob Jeffrey of having had a hand in the crime, and was doubtless possessed of more evidence involving him than he had yet disclosed. Wishing to hide his own identity and mission as long as possible, Keene

decided that Bragg was the man for him to watch in a search for information.

He followed the constable to the front of the house. The news of the crime had spread, and many people had gathered in the front yard and along the street, where, despite the cold, they stood surveying the scene of the tragedy. Reporters were arriving from Lynn and Boston, and before nightfall the news was destined to become public property.

Detective Keene entered the hall, and observed Bragg and the coroner in close consultation in the parlor. Very evidently some decisive move was imminent, and the detective inferred that a speedy inquest was probable if this hustling officer of the law had already secured sufficient evidence to warrant it. That Keene was right in his conjecture presently appeared.

Hearing his name spoken, he turned toward the library, and saw Lawyer French beckoning to him from the partly open door.

"Come in here, Mr. Keene," said the lawyer. "I want you to meet Mabel and Mr. Thorpe."

"Certainly, sir," bowed the detective.

The attorney closed the door, and then introduced him to the two mentioned, who were the only other occupants of the room. Looking at the pale, sweet face of the girl, Keene could not but feel a thrill of pity for her, knowing too well the painful ordeal she was destined yet to meet, and he resolved to stand between her and greater sorrow, if by any means it was possible.

"I met your associate on his arrival," said Thorpe, with grave courtesy, as he again shook Sheridan Keene's hand. "It was he who told me you were here."

"The introduction will serve as a voucher for me, however," said Keene, smiling gravely.

"Ah, but I needed no voucher, Mr. Keene," replied Thorpe, agreeably. "We all are very fond of Mr. French, who is like one of the family, and his friends are our friends, I hope. I have turned the investigation of this dreadful affair over to him."

"It is dreadful, indeed," bowed Keene, with sympathy.

"I understand the coroner has arrived. If

you will excuse me, Mr. French, I think I will see if I can serve him in any way."

"Certainly, Richard," nodded the lawyer. "I'll join you with him presently. What is his name, by the way?"

"Mr. Clark. He was once on the bench, but retired because of ill-health. He is improved, now, and is a rather able lawyer."

"I will meet him in a few moments."

"I'll tell him so, sir."

And Richard Thorpe, who was evidently a man of instinctive gentility, bowed and softly withdrew.

"Mabel," said the lawyer, now turning to the bereaved girl, "I wish to say one word before I go."

"Yes, sir."

"This gentleman, Mr. Keene, is one of my associates, and his interest in this affair and in your welfare will not be less than my own. Should the occasion arise, I want you to speak as freely to him as you would to me, and tell him anything you may know. Will you do so?"

"I will, Mr. French, if you tell me to," said Mabel, with a grateful glance in the direction of Sheridan Keene.

"It will be to your advantage, I think," bowed the lawyer. "Have you seen the coroner, Mr. Keene?"

"He is in the parlor," replied the latter, drawing the attorney aside.

"With the constable?"

"Yes," said Keene, lowering his voice to a whisper. "I foresee what is coming, and it may prove all for the best. Let them start an inquest as soon as they wish, and rather expedite it, if it comes in your way to do so."

"Have you discovered anything?"

"I shall discover something," murmured Keene, significantly, "but I cannot yet say how. Take care not to observe me too closely, and don't betray my business here."

"Surely not!"

"If a jury is impaneled to-day, and the inquest begun, plan to remain here over night, and retain me with you."

"I can easily do that."

"Now, I want a few words with this girl alone, so slip away and leave me with her. I'll see you again later."

"Very well."

"One moment, sir! Don't interpose any objection to Bragg's doings!"

"I understand."

The lawyer nodded, then turned to Mabel Jeffrey and said a few low words of encouragement, and presently withdrew from the room.

And Sheridan Keene found himself alone with the girl whose happiness he had resolved, if possible, to restore. But he already knew that the barrier to be removed was a serious one.

"Though words alone give but little comfort in great bereavements, Mrs. Jeffrey, allow me to express at least my sympathy," he said, with grave kindness, as he approached and took a seat by her side. "Mr. French has informed me of some portions of your history, and I quite appreciate your present distress."

His gentle tone instantly won her. She regarded him with tearful eyes, and replied, with tremulous pathos:

"You are very good, sir, to speak so kindly."

"I know all about your estrangement from your father and the causes of it," Keene gravely continued. "I shall be very glad if I can serve you effectively, and very possibly I may yet be able to do so. I would like, however, to ask you a few questions, which, perhaps, may seem to you unwarrantably personal. But I will preface them by saying that I have only your happiness and welfare in view."

"Ah, sir, the assurance given me by dear Mr. French is a sufficient voucher for that," said Mabel, in grateful tones.

"And you will answer my questions?"

"Willingly, sir, under the circumstances."

"You shall have no occasion to regret it," smiled Keene, gravely. "Tell me how long you had known Robert Jeffrey when you married him."

"Since childhood, sir."

"And loved him that long?"

"We were always fond of one another, sir," she said, simply; and a faint tint of pink now showed in her pale cheeks.

"He has been a kind husband?"

"Very, sir! None can disprove that; nor

can man or woman turn me from Bob, or Robert from me. Of that I am sure!"

"I am glad to hear you say so," bowed Keene, smiling at her fervor. "Do you know why your father objected to your marriage?"

"Solely because he had set his mind upon my marrying my cousin, Richard. Father was terribly hard, in his way—but I can forgive and forget, now, sir!"

"Of course, of course," nodded Keene. "Yet Mr. Thorpe was willing to marry you, I understand."

"Yes, sir," said Mabel, sadly. "That was the one occasion on which I think my cousin unmanly and unkind—for he knew my sentiments."

"Has he generally been interested in your welfare?"

"Save then alone," was the reply. "Yes, Richard has done all he could to reunite me with my father. In that he has been very earnest and manly. I bear him no ill-will, sir."

"What effect has your father's antipathy had upon your husband, Mrs. Jeffrey?"

A startled expression crept into the woman's eyes, then slowly faded. The assurance given her in the beginning still held sway.

"Alas, sir!" she replied, "a most unhappy effect. It has made him very gloomy and morose. He has bitterly resented my father's treatment of me, more than of himself; and he also discredits Richard's display of friendship. He has bitterly denounced both of them, and too openly at times, I fear—for he is an honest and plain-spoken man, is Bob Jeffrey, and quick of temper. But, sir," and now she laid her fair hand with touching significance on the detective's arm, "my husband would do no man bodily harm, save in self-defense, or in some righteous cause—of that I am sure!"

Sheridan Keene was a little moved by the look in her pathetic eyes, yet he could answer only:

"Hold fast to your faith in him, then, like a loving and loyal wife, whatever may come!"

"I shall do that, sir."

"Now, tell me, has this moodiness led him to indulge in drink to any serious extent?"

"Indeed, sir, no! I never saw Bob the worse for liquor."

"Has he remained away from you nights?"

"Never, sir, since our marriage!"

"Where is he to-day?"

"At work in Malden."

"Has he been informed of what has happened here?"

"I have asked that word be sent to him, sir."

"He will probably come as soon as he hears the sad news."

"Surely, sir!"

"Did Mr. Thorpe call on you last evening?"

"Yes, sir—and Mrs. Haynie."

"Was your husband at home?"

"No, sir. He always avoids Richard. My cousin and I waited for him till after eight o'clock, then Richard had to look after his horse."

"Did your husband soon arrive?"

"Not until near midnight, sir."

"Was that unusual?"

"Very, sir! But he said where he had been," Mabel hastened to add. "He was up about the house here, thinking whether it were not best to try to get a word with father in my behalf. But he did not see him, sir—of that I am sure; for I'll not doubt Bob's word!"

"Did you sit up at home for him, Mrs. Jeffrey?"

"Not in the house, sir. I went out with Richard when he left, and went to look for Bob. Not finding him, I became anxious. I stood about near home and walking the street, until he finally came along."

"Ah, yes! Then you both went home?"

"Yes, sir."

"That was about midnight?"

"Precisely, sir. It was just twelve by the clock in our dining-room, and we went to bed at once."

"What time did your husband go to work this morning?"

"He left home at six o'clock. He wouldn't allow me to rise that early, as I was up so late last night; and I did not leave my bed until word was brought me of this dreadful event. Then I came up here at once."

"Do you live far from here?"

"About half a mile, sir. I think—oh, there's Bob!"

The sound of a voice from the hall had reached both their ears, a voice that was deep and full, and ringing with manly affection.

"In the library, you say? Let me pass, please?"

Mabel Jeffrey had sprung to her feet, and would have approached the door, but something in the tones he had heard led Sheridan Keene to wave her back. He opened the door himself and looked into the hall.

Richard Thorpe, with hand extended, stood confronting a strapping, handsome man in workman's dress, yet in whose pale features and repellent attitude pride and scorn cried out with mutely eloquent effect.

"Mr. Jeffrey," Thorpe was saying, "this is no time for bitterness between you and me! I would not willingly do you a wrong. Will you take my hand?"

"No, sir! I will never take your hand till I know it to be that of a true man!" cried Jeffrey, with terrible sternness. "Let me go to my wife, sir!"

Thorpe instantly stepped aside, and Sheridan Keene admitted Jeffrey to his wife's presence and closed the door.

"Who was that rough fellow?" he asked of Thorpe, as he joined him in the hall.

"An infernal fool, who don't know what's for his own good," said Thorpe, with a shrug of his shoulders. "He is Mabel's husband, and I'd have been his friend, if he'd have let me."

"He acts like a ruffian. Some men are blind to their own interests!" said Keene, bluntly.

"You're right in that, Mr. Keene!" replied Thorpe, with immediate approval. "Here is Mr. French."

Sheridan Keene turned as the lawyer approached, and the three entered the parlor. There were more people gathering in and about the house, and the attorney explained:

"Mr. Clark has decided to impanel a jury this afternoon, Mr. Keene," he said. "He is not sure the inquest will begin before morning, however."

"The sooner the better, I think," observed Thorpe. "Delay may prevent our getting at the truth of this affair."

"But there are certain legal proceedings necessary, my dear Richard."

"I presume so, sir. I leave it all to you."

"Can you accommodate Mr. Keene and myself to-night?"

"Certainly, sir."

"You can remain, Mr. Keene?"

"That's for you to say, sir. I suppose the case of Gammon vs. Welch can wait my return?"

"Oh, yes; that's not important."

"I can remain, then."

"You can have my chamber, which has a stove," said Thorpe, agreeably. "I shall be glad to give it up to you."

"You're very kind," nodded Keene, with manifest appreciation.

Something like a quarter-hour later, he observed that Constable Bragg, upon whose movements he was keeping a furtive watch, was leaving the house alone and striking across lots toward a strip of woodland. He decided he would follow and try to ascertain the nature of the constable's mission. His celerity in securing evidence had already impressed the detective.

By constant maneuvering, Keene succeeded in tracking the constable unobserved, and at the end of a quarter-hour saw him approach a pretty wooden cottage, which he at once suspected to be that of Bob Jeffrey. The detective dropped behind a wall to watch the constable's movements.

Mr. Bragg was certainly there with a mission of no ordinary importance. He tried the several doors in an attempt to enter, and finally resorted to the windows. With these he was more successful, and presently, finding one he could open, he boldly entered the house.

Keene now found himself at a disadvantage. He suspected Bragg was there in search of something, yet to approach for the purpose of spying was to invite discovery and possibly awaken misgivings.

He waited a full hour, thinking the constable might emerge; then he decided to take the chances. He stole to one of the side windows and looked in.

It was a window of the dining-room, and by good luck he caught Mr. Bragg in the very act of searching the sideboard, inside,

under and behind. He already had searched the most of the house. He was so intently occupied, however, that he had no eyes for the opposite window, and Keene watched him unobserved. But this persistent and methodical search proved vain, until examination was made of a tall old clock in one corner.

From the upper box of this and through one of the hinged panels, which, from either side, gave access to the works, this indefatigable servant of the law extracted a narrow, flat object, which evidently had stopped the movement of the works, since the long pendulum hung motionless.

Detective Keene instantly observed the parcel to be a thin package of documents, tied with a string. Were these the papers for which the house of Jacob Moore had been searched and his desk ravaged?

The detective glanced at the face of the clock.

The hands pointed to twelve.

The very hour at which Bob Jeffrey had returned home the night before!

Sheridan Keene ducked from observation and stole back to the wall.

The hustling constable presently emerged from the window with a bundle under his arm and a look of triumph under his bushy brows, and struck back across lots to the scene of the tragedy.

But Sheridan Keene did not follow him.

For where the work of the constable ended that of the detective began.

CHAPTER VI.

THE INQUEST.

It was nearly four o'clock when Detective Keene returned to the Moore dwelling, when he found his inference relative to the inquest to be correct. Judge Clark already had impaneled a coroner's jury, and was about issuing summons upon the various persons whose testimony as witnesses was desired. During this latter work, he was constantly in private conference with the busy constable. The day was so far spent, however, that the inquest itself was not to be begun until nine the following morning.

Keene and Lawyer French spent the night

at the house, but Robert Jeffrey and his wife returned home. The detective had a brief talk with them before their departure, however, but solely of a conventional character. He was rather favorably impressed with Jeffrey, whose outspoken manner and sturdy Saxon nature were those of a man of genuine worth. Yet he was not without a certain reserve when with friends, which indicated considerable diffidence or bashfulness.

The following day was clear and cold, and long before nine o'clock the hall and lower rooms of the Moore dwelling were thronged with people, the jury, impaneled the previous day, the witnesses who had been summoned, and no end of curious and interested neighbors. The remains of Jacob Moore had been removed to an upper chamber, and the entire ground floor of the house was to serve the requirements of the day.

It was precisely nine o'clock when Judge Clark took his seat at the table at one end of the large parlor, and arranged a place for his stenographer. He was a grave, thin-featured man, with sharp eyes and a dignified air of decision.

The jury occupied chairs at one end of the room, that next to the windows. The witnesses were seated opposite the coroner, with the centre of the room vacant, to be used by each in giving the required testimony. A table for several reporters was near the hall door, and the hall itself was thronged with observers.

Just after nine o'clock both Lawyer French and Sheridan Keene entered the room and took seats near the coroner. Both had had a long conference with him that morning, one result of which possibly appeared in his opening words, if any well-informed hearer took notice. Immediately after rapping for order, he said, gravely:

"I may deviate a little from the ordinary course in conducting this inquiry, gentlemen of the jury. A crime has been committed, and the object of this inquest is to gather any facts which may shed light upon the case and serve to apprehend the criminal. Truth and justice are what the law aims to sustain, and mere methods to further that end are of secondary importance. Lawyer French, if you desire at any time to question

a witness in the interest of the relatives of the deceased, I will give you the privilege."

The attorney bowed.

"If it becomes desirable, judge, my associate, Mr. Keene, will avail himself of your courtesy," he said, blandly.

The coroner glanced over the room, then said, shortly:

"Dr. Carr, will you take the stand?"

Amid a profound silence, the little physician left his seat among the witnesses and came to the middle of the room. His testimony was a long report of his examination of the remains of the deceased, a rather scientific and pedantic dissertation, as clear as mud to the twelve jurymen; yet it established the fact that Jacob Moore had been killed by violence at the hand of another, which was the first fact necessary to establish. This having been done, Dr. Carr was excused from farther attendance and allowed to depart about his business.

From the array of witnesses which energetic Mr. Bragg had unearthed, the coroner then selected those best suited to his purpose.

The first was the keeper of the turnpike tavern, a man named Jenks, who testified to the time when both Thorpe and Joe Darbage had come to the tavern on the night of the crime, and the interval they remained there. Jenks further testified that Robert Jeffrey visited his place, occasionally drinking there, and at times using threatening language against both Moore and Richard Thorpe. At one time, in an altercation with Darbage over the character of Thorpe, Jenks further testified that Jeffrey had drawn a knife in the violence of his passion, and that he and Darbage had come to blows.

The effect of all this on the various observers was at once noticeable, for it hinted at the culmination to which the inquest was likely to tend. Mabel Jeffrey grew more than ever pale, and was trembling visibly; but Jeffrey himself, who had a chair by her side, sat as motionless as a man of bronze, with a flush on his cheeks and a subdued fire in the depths of his frowning eyes.

With the retirement of Mr. Jenks, the coroner turned to a corpulent, perturbed-looking woman in middle life, and said, quietly:

"As you are the last person known to have seen Moore alive, I next will ask you to testify, Mrs. Haynie. You may sit, if you prefer, Mrs. Haynie."

Sheridan Keene at once arose and placed a chair for her in the middle of the room.

Very much frustrated by instantly becoming the centre of attraction, the corpulent lady, with much blushing and coughing, managed at length to take the seat provided.

"What is your name, please?" asked the coroner.

"Margaret Haynie."

"And your residence?"

"I have been housekeeper for Mr. Moore for most twelve years."

"I understand that you were not at home all of Tuesday evening?"

"No, sir; I was not," Mrs. Haynie replied, by degrees recovering her composure.

"At what time did you leave here?"

"It was just seven o'clock."

"Had Mr. Moore retired for the night?"

"He had—leastwise he was in his chamber. I went through the kitchen to see Mr. Darbage, who was in the stable, and told him I would come back in just an hour."

Mrs. Haynie, encouraged by the sound of her own voice, characteristic of her sex, was now inclined to exercise it.

"Did you do so?" inquired the coroner.

"No, sir. I went to see a sick friend, and carried some catnip; then called on Mabel Jeffrey. I stayed there till eight o'clock."

"You seem quite positive about the hour, Mrs. Haynie."

"So I am, sir," was the ready reply. "I know, because Mr. Richard came in just as I was leaving, and I called Mabel's attention to the dining-room clock."

"Did you leave immediately after Mr. Thorpe came?"

"Yes, sir."

"And returned home?"

"I did."

"How long did it take you?"

"Maybe it were three-quarters of an hour. Being rather fat"—and here Mrs. Haynie blushed profusely—"I did not hurry."

"Did you see any person near here when you were returning?"

Mrs. Haynie hesitated, colored more deeply than ever; and the coroner added:

"In other words, did you meet Mr. Jeffrey?"

"No, sir; I didn't meet Mr. Jeffrey," Mrs. Haynie faltered, tremulously.

None of this escaped the eye of her questioner, who now said, a little sharply:

"Did you see him at all? This is not a matter for equivocation."

"Yes, I did," explained Mrs. Haynie, turning white under the rebuke.

"Where was he?"

"He was walking in the grounds, out beyond the stable."

"Did you speak to him?"

"No, sir. He was gone in a jiffy."

"Did you come directly to the house?"

"I did, sir, and sat down in the kitchen to rest till the clock struck nine. I know the time, sir, because I counted."

"Did you see anything of Mr. Darbage?"

"No, sir, I didn't. He was not in the stable. I went up to the library and fixed the lamp for Mr. Richard, when he should return."

"Did you go to Moore's chamber?"

"Yes, sir, I did."

"For what purpose?"

"I saw his door was ajar, and I went to close it."

The coroner sat in silent thought for several moments, while his every hearer waited with intense interest for his next words.

"Had you a lamp, Mrs. Haynie?" he asked, at length.

"I had one in my hand, sir, but I placed it on the stairs when I went down the hall."

"Did you enter Moore's room?"

"I stepped just over the threshold, to see if the fire was right."

"Did you find it so?"

"Yes, sir. Joe—that's Darbage—he had fixed it."

"Did Moore speak to you, Mrs. Haynie?"

"No, sir. He was fast asleep."

"Then you could see him, could you?"

"La! yes, sir. It was bright moonlight. I am sure he was asleep, for I stayed only for a moment, lest I should wake him. Then I made sure to fasten the latch of the door,

which is damaged; for an old man like him oughtn't to sleep in a draught."

"Is the latch of the door so damaged, Mrs. Haynie, that the door comes ajar unless secured with considerable care?"

"Yes, sir; that's the very trouble. That's most likely why it came ajar after Joe—that's Darbage, sir—closed it."

The coroner drew himself up in his chair, and settled his collar and tie.

"Mrs. Haynie," he asked, with his voice involuntarily betraying a quickening mental action, "at what time did you arise next morning?"

"About seven o'clock, sir."

"Did you go to Moore's room?"

"I did, sir. I went to fix his fire," stammered Mrs. Haynie, beginning to grow pale at her recollection of the picture that there had met her gaze.

"Did you find the door latched, as you had left it?"

"I did, sir; just the same," cried the witness, decidedly.

"Could you tell if Moore had changed his position during the night?"

"Lord, sir!"—and Mrs. Haynie's teeth chattered—"I didn't see nothing but blood and gore and those staring eyes."

"That will do, Mrs. Haynie," interposed the coroner, and he signified with a wave of his hand that he had finished questioning her.

In her chair, at the opposite side of the room, Mabel Jeffrey sat with the last vestige of color gone from her girlish face.

As Mrs. Haynie started to rise from her chair, Detective Keene leaned forward in his, and gravely interposed:

"One moment, Mrs. Haynie, if you please," he said, politely. "I would like to ask you a question."

"Yes, sir," assented the woman, in rather timid tones.

"You say it was exactly eight o'clock when you left Mrs. Jeffrey's cottage that evening? Are you sure that the clock was going?"

"Yes, sir, I am," replied the witness; "for I had no other means of noting the time, and I remarked to Mabel, when I left, that I had been there half an hour."

"Thank you," nodded Keene, indifferently.

"Now, you say you had no lamp when you entered Moore's room before retiring. How were you able to see him?"

"Only by the moonlight, sir. It was a very bright night, and one of the curtains was raised."

"Could you swear, Mrs. Haynie, that Moore was not dead at that very moment?"

"Lord, sir, no!" cried Mrs. Haynie, with more confusion than she had yet betrayed. "If you keep asking me questions, sir, I shall get where I can't swear to anything."

"Very well, Mrs. Haynie," laughed Sheridan Keene. "In that case, I will stop immediately."

A murmur of rising excitement ran round the room when Sheridan Keene interposed his questions, and even Richard Thorpe leaned forward with quickening interest; but the apparent indifference with which the detective terminated his inquiries, and the laugh with which he accepted Mrs. Haynie's final response, served to dispel from most minds the idea that he had been actuated by any hidden motive. Furtive glances between a few, nevertheless, indicated that a suspicion had arisen of something under the surface.

As Keene settled back in his chair, still smiling as if amused, and corpulent Mrs. Haynie waddled back to her seat in the row of witnesses, Judge Clark said a few subdued words to his stenographer, and then resumed the inquiry.

"I next would like your testimony, Mr. Thorpe," he said, with a glance in the latter's direction.

Richard Thorpe immediately arose and came forward, till the full glare of light from the window fell upon him. If he was rather pale, it was but natural under the trying circumstances; and he was certainly very self-possessed, and met the coroner's gaze with no sign of perturbation.

For the first time since the inquiry, Bob Jeffrey betrayed noticeable interest. He drew up his powerful figure higher in his chair, and the hands resting on his hips were tightly clenched. His wife observed, and significantly laid her fair hand upon his arm, at which he nodded slightly; but his frowning

blue eyes never for an instant left the face and figure of the man standing on the floor.

"What is your full name, Mr. Thorpe?" began the coroner.

Without a tremor in his voice, though he well knew that some there might think him the heir to Jacob Moore's thousands, the witness answered:

"Richard Gaylord Thorpe."

"You are a nephew of the deceased?"

"Yes, sir."

"What is your vocation?"

"I have a brokerage business in Boston."

"Do you reside there a part of the time?"

"Yes, sir; I keep rooms in Appleton street."

"Do you consider your home there?"

"No, sir; I was reared in this house, and consider it my home."

"And you are here a portion of the time?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you travel between here and Boston by train mostly?"

"In bad weather I do. At other times I usually ride my horse, which I keep for enjoyment and exercise."

"A saddle-horse, I take it."

"Yes, sir."

"When here, do you usually pass your nights in this house?"

"As a general thing, yes," Thorpe answered, with a nod. "Sometimes, however, I remain over night at the turnpike tavern."

"How about last Tuesday night, that on which your uncle was killed?" asked the coroner, with scarce a change in his monotonous intonation.

"I was at the tavern."

"At what time did you leave here?"

"About seven o'clock."

"Did you go at once to the tavern, Mr. Thorpe?"

"I did not."

"Where else?"

"I rode up toward Malden, sir, then swung across to Revere till I struck the turnpike, and thence to the tavern, where I left my horse while I called upon my cousin, Mrs. Jeffrey."

"How long a ride would you call that, Mr. Thorpe?" asked the coroner, with some display of indifference.

"Between five and six miles, I should say."

"After leaving your horse at the tavern, did you go directly to your cousin's house?"

"Yes, sir, I did."

"Arriving there about what time, please?"

"About eight o'clock, as Mrs. Haynie has testified."

"How long did you remain there, Mr. Thorpe?"

"About half an hour, sir."

"Did you leave there before or after Mrs. Haynie?"

"After, sir. I sat with Mrs. Jeffrey in the sitting-room, waiting for her husband to come in; and about half-past eight we both went out upon the street. I left Mrs. Jeffrey at her gate, and returned to the tavern."

"What did you do there?"

"I found a card game in progress and took a hand."

"How long were you so engaged?"

"Until I heard the clock strike twelve," replied Thorpe, who now looked as if he didn't quite see why he should be questioned so closely. "I was then about to return home, when I was told that it had grown very cold out of doors."

"Well?"

"Well, what, sir? Am I to understand that you wish to know my every movement?" demanded Thorpe, with a slight frown.

The coroner did not resent his umbrage.

"You are to understand, Mr. Thorpe, that you are an heir presumptive of the deceased, which makes your testimony very desirable," he replied, quietly. "You may decline to answer any of my questions, if you have any reason for so doing."

Thorpe colored deeply, and hastened to exclaim:

"I beg your pardon, judge! I had overlooked the fact of my relationship. I will answer any questions that you may ask."

For a moment Thorpe's attitude had created a vague suspicion in many minds; but it was instantly dissipated by his immediate and gentlemanly change. Even the coroner bowed a grave acknowledgment.

"Well, then, Mr. Thorpe," he continued, quietly, "how were you influenced by the

fact that it had become very cold during your stay at the tavern?"

"I was led to remain there until morning, sir. My horse had not previously been out of her stable for a week. I thought it unsafe to expose her to the sudden change. I did not wish to walk home, moreover, so I remained where I was."

"You might as well have stated that without demurring," smiled the judge.

"I regret my mistake," Thorpe again observed, "and hope you will not misinterpret it."

"No, surely not! You remained at the tavern, then, until morning?"

"Yes, sir."

"Was Joe Darbage in your company?"

"I did not see Joe Darbage, sir."

"Do you know if the deceased has been in the habit of keeping large sums of money in the house?"

"He has not, sir, in so far as I know."

"Upon what terms have you lived with him?"

"Our relations have been amicable."

"When did you last see him alive, Mr. Thorpe?"

"When I mounted my horse, Tuesday evening, and rode out of the stable. He then was standing at the window of his room, in which a lamp was burning. He was about retiring to bed."

"Did he usually retire so early?"

"Yes, sir. His health has lately been poor."

"Do you know if he has executed a will, Mr. Thorpe?"

"Most assuredly I do not!" was the emphatic rejoinder.

"That is all at present, Mr. Thorpe," said the coroner.

Then he glanced at Sheridan Keene; but Keene was gazing with thoughtful eyes at the intricate figure in the carpet covering the floor.

Mr. Thorpe bowed himself back to his seat, and within a minute had resumed his complacent indifference.

The frown on the face of Bob Jeffrey, however, had steadily deepened.

CHAPTER VII.

THE TESTIMONY OF JOE DARBAGE.

Though it already was approaching noon, Judge Clark did not call a recess. Evidently, he was following a plan previously laid out in his mind, for, without a moment's hesitation, he said, sharply:

"Mr. Darbage will now take the stand."

There was a craning of necks in the hall when the groom came forward. Such scenes, though for the most part quietly conducted, involve such terrible results that an undercurrent of excitement pervades the proceedings from the very beginning, and becomes the stronger and more intense as the inquiry progresses. There were pale faces among the crowd and eyes eager to see; yet scarce a sound rose from all the throng, so intent were all to lose no part of the testimony evoked.

The witness called came forward from a corner of the room and took the position that Richard Thorpe had vacated. He still was roughly clad, with his pants tucked in at the top of his cowhide boots. His face was grim, his brows knit, his eyes glittering brightly; but the steady gaze of so many curious people had no perceptible effect upon him until he chanced to catch a piercing glance from the eyes of Sheridan Keene, when he flushed slightly.

"What is your name?" demanded the coroner.

"Darbage," was the reply; and the speaker cleared his throat with a hoarse cough, and thrust his hands into his pockets.

"You full name?" said the coroner.

"My front name's Joseph—Joe, for short."

"Your birthplace?"

"Couldn't say, sir," growled Darbage, steadily eyeing his questioner from under his brows.

"Do you mean to say, Mr. Darbage, that you don't know where you were born?" Judge Clark demanded, sharply.

"That's just what I mean, sir," Darbage nodded, unabashed. "But 'twas somewhere about Liverpool, I reckon. That's the first place I remember of!"

"Who were your parents?"

"I don't know I ever had any—leastwise, I never seen 'em."

A slight smile crossed the faces of some, and the jurors took occasion to twist uneasily in their seats; but the expression of grim decorum on the face of Mr. Darbage did not alter in the least.

The coroner frowned slightly, and his voice hardened.

"What is your occupation?" he asked, after a brief pause.

"Just now I'm a stable man, and do odd work about here, sir."

"How long have you occupied your present place?"

"'Bout a year."

"Don't you know when you came here?"

"I can't say exact. I've no head for dates."

"What was your previous employment?"

"I didn't have any. I picked up an odd job now and then, and when 'twas gone I looked up another. I reckon I've been knocked about as much as any."

"So it appears!" observed the judge, with rather dry austerity. "Where were you located, Mr. Darbage, before you came here?"

"Round Boston and New York, at times."

"Your information doesn't give one a very definite idea of yourself or your past, Mr. Darbage."

"My own idea ain't over definite, please you!" replied Darbage, with a furtive glance of his gray eyes.

"What led you to come out this way?"

"I was thinking a change might do me good, so I reckoned I'd come. I s'pose a man has a right to go where he likes, sir."

"You may suppose what you please, providing you keep your suppositions to yourself and answer my questions," said Judge Clark, sternly. "Where did you first go, when you arrived in these parts?"

"I knocked about the turnpike tavern for a week or two, till I brought up here," said Mr. Darbage, with his grim composure unruffled by the coroner's sharp rebuke.

"What were you doing at the tavern?"

"Looking for a job, sir."

"Were you employed there?"

"No, sir."

"Then you were supplied with money at that time, were you?"

The brows of the grim witness drew closer, and he hesitated for a moment, then answered:

"I had a little."

"Where did you get it, Mr. Darbage?"

"'Twas some I found in the street."

"Ah, you were very fortunate! Then you found sufficient money to pay your way at the tavern for a week or two before coming to work here—is that it?"

"I reckon that's about the size of it, sir. The other hostler here——"

"Never mind about the other hostler, Mr. Darbage!" interrupted the coroner, curtly.

At this moment Constable Bragg entered the room, bringing with him the refreshing chill of the wintry air outside. He bore a small parcel wrapped in paper, which he handed to the coroner, at the same time whispering a few words in his ear. Judge Clark put the parcel in the table drawer, but his grave countenance underwent no change.

"On Tuesday evening, Mr. Darbage," he continued, "where were you?"

"'Bout what time, sir?" returned Darbage, sententially.

"From the time you saddled Mr. Thorpe's horse until morning."

"Here about the house, and at the tavern."

"At what time did you leave here?"

"Can't say exact, sir. 'Tween eight and nine."

"You have no head for time either, it appears."

"Not over much, I reckon," admitted Darbage, with a grim smile.

"Perhaps you have a better head for other things. Which way did you go from here?"

"The shortest; across the meadows."

"What occasioned your visit to the tavern that night?"

"I went to see one o' the girls there."

"Was she expecting you?"

"I reckon she was. I'd told her I'd come."

"How long before you left here did you last see the deceased?"

"'Bout five minutes. I went to his room to put a log on the fire, and I saw him in bed."

"Did he speak to you?"

"He did. He said the room was warm

enough. I told him it were getting cold out, and he said for me to do as I pleased."

Sheridan Keene added a note to several memoranda upon a slip of paper which he held in the palm of his hand.

"What did you do next?" continued the coroner.

"Went to my room and changed my coat and then went to the tavern."

"Did you close the door of Moore's chamber?"

"Yes, sir."

"And latch it?"

"Couldn't say for sure, sir. I thought I did."

"You then were alone in the house with him?"

"Yes, sir. Mrs. Haynie had gone out."

"Did you see anybody about the grounds?"

"Mr. Jeffrey came to the door, but he didn't get in."

"Where were you when he came?"

"Just leaving my room. I heard some one try the front door, which was bolted, and I hurried down and saw him on the steps."

"Did you open the door?"

"I did, and told him I reckoned he'd have to come again."

"Did he say what he wanted?"

"He said he wanted to see Mr. Moore. I told him he was in bed, and then he went away."

"Did you notice which way he went?"

"I watched him till he went down the walk toward the road."

"Why did you delay to watch him, Mr. Darbage, when you knew your lady at the tavern was waiting for you?"

The question, coming sharply from the coroner, caused Mr. Darbage some little discomfiture, the first he had betrayed; yet he replied quite readily:

"Only to see where he was going, sir. Just then my lady was less to me than my curiosity."

"Very evidently! Had Mrs. Haynie returned when you left?"

"No, sir."

"About what time did you reach the tavern?"

"'Bout nine o'clock."

"And remained there till morning?"

"Oh, no, sir; 'twas scarcely past one o'clock when I left."

"You seem to remember that hour well enough, don't you? That is all, Mr. Darbage."

And Mr. Darbage, apparently wholly indifferent, walked out of the room and repaired to the stable and to his pipe.

Hardly a person present but expected Robert Jeffrey would immediately be called to the stand, but the coroner at once adjourned the inquest until two in the afternoon.

As he was about to rise, Constable Jim Bragg leaned over and whispered a few words, to which he replied:

"I do not think the arrest is necessary at present. Jeffrey doesn't appear like a man about to run away. Leave it till the inquest is ended."

CHAPTER VIII.

BETWEEN THE LINKS.

With adjournment of the inquest, Sheridan Keene at once turned to Lawyer French, and said, softly, in a rather hurried way:

"Don't interfere with my movements now, nor delay me with questions. I am going to slip away, and shall visit the turnpike tavern, where I'll get my lunch."

"Very well," nodded the lawyer.

Yet the expression on his face was rather doubtful, and the evidence accumulating against Robert Jeffrey was so damaging that he could not easily contain his misgivings. He had not been informed at what Sheridan Keene was driving, and he felt vague fears that the discernment and sagacity of the young detective would prove unequal to the requirements of so complicated and desperate a case.

"Be very careful," added Keene, softly, "that my true purpose here is not disclosed. If any questions are asked about it, or hints thrown out, say something in response to sustain the assumption."

"I will do so."

"And if you express any opinion upon the case, let it be that you fear Mr. Jeffrey is in a bad box."

"Heavens knows, Mr. Keene, I cannot express any other opinion," replied the attor-

ney, with manifest distress. "I would I could!"

"I'll adjust that for you—when the man and the hour are in joint!" answered Keene, scarce above his breath. "But don't reflect that assurance in your face, or give it to another, lest you ruin all!"

He did not wait for a response from the lawyer, but abruptly turned and left the room, worming his way among the people in the hall, and securing his overcoat and hat from a near closet. As he was returning, and aiming to depart from the front door, he came in contact with Richard Thorpe, who was just emerging from the parlor.

Thorpe instantly detained him, asking, in a low whisper:

"Why did you question Mrs. Haynie in that way?"

"Merely to suggest a point for Mr. French," Keene explained, both pleasantly and vaguely. "The case is going to be a walkover, however."

"Do you think so?"

"Sure thing! The evidence will be conclusive. That Bragg is a wonder for getting at things, and ought to be on the city force."

"He is very energetic," nodded Thorpe, in whose dark eyes there now was an expression of manifest relief.

"Energetic doesn't express it!" laughed Keene. "I wouldn't have him after me, as he's after Jeffrey, for all a man's neck is worth."

"It looks bad for Mabel's husband, I'll admit," Thorpe answered, with dubious sympathy. "I'm deucedly sorry for him! You'll be here to lunch with us?"

"Probably, thanks! I'm going for a breath of fresh air, first of all. It's as hot and close as an oven in there."

"I shall expect you back."

Sheridan Keene bowed and smiled agreeably, and moved toward the door. Avoiding the curious gaze of those about him, he immediately left the house and took a short walk up the road.

At the end of ten minutes he returned, sauntering carelessly into the yard; and presently, in an aimless sort of way, turned his steps in the direction of the stable. One of

the broad doors stood open, and Mr. Joe Darbage was busily grooming Richard Thorpe's horse, which stood in the barn.

The hostler looked up on hearing the detective's approach, but his grim face gave no sign of his feelings, whatever they may have been. He continued his work in silence, and it became necessary for Sheridan Keene to open the conversation.

"Which is the short cut by which one can go from here to the turnpike tavern?" he asked, pleasantly.

Mr. Darbage straightened up from the animal's fore fetlock.

"Out that way," he replied, pointing with his forefinger, one joint of which Keene observed to be missing. "Take the path through the gap in the hedge and strike straight across the meadows."

"Is the walking good?"

"'Tis in this kind o' weather," said Darbage. "In the spring, or in mild days, it's kind o' damp in places."

"How much does it save one in distance?"

"'Bout a half-mile, I reckon."

"Well, that's worth saving on a cold day or a wet one."

"So 'tis," assented Darbage, glumly. "I most always go that way."

"Cars run over the turnpike, don't they?"

"Often, sir."

"I may want to go into town a little later," explained Keene, rising from the grain-box, on which he had briefly seated himself. "That's a fine-looking horse, Mr. Darbage," he added, drawing nearer to survey the animal.

"Aye, sir; she's a good horse."

"Mr. Thorpe's?"

"Yes, sir."

"That's the one he rides most of the time, I suppose?"

"All the time—when he rides."

"It must be a great pleasure," observed Keene after a pause of several minutes, during which he studied the animal more closely. "We poor devils, who are compelled to dig in the pages of musty law books, don't get many chances for riding."

"I s'pose not," said Darbage, furtively viewing him from under his brows.

"Is she speedy?"

"Tolerably so," growled the groom, becoming impatient, "and a good cross-country rider."

"Want to know!" exclaimed Keene, with increased display of interest, and he studied the mare harder than ever. "Mr. Thorpe rides a good deal, I take it."

"Sometimes."

"She doesn't look as if ridden hard."

"She ain't been out but once for a week back," answered Darbage, with a deeper frown. "That's what makes her so restless."

"Is it?"

"Besides, she don't fancy strangers standing around her. You'd better get back a little, if you're going to stay here."

And then the groom, perhaps thinking his own departure might accelerate that of his importunate visitor, caught up a bucket from the floor and started for a well in the yard to draw some water.

Quick as a flash, Sheridan Keene placed a sheet of paper beneath one forehoof of the mare and raised the other. A moment later he strolled carelessly out of the stable, meeting Mr. Darbage returning; but he had in his pocket an impression of one of the mare's iron shoes.

"Bound off?" questioned Darbage, with a suspicious gleam in his gray eyes.

"Just for a bit of a walk," nodded Keene. "I think I'll slip over to the tavern and buy a cigar."

He did not look back to see if Darbage was watching him. He followed the latter's directions, the way taking him back of the stable and through an orchard, and thence into a hollow where the hedge ran along a low strip of meadow. He found the gap mentioned, and passing through it, examined the ground with careful scrutiny.

He discovered just what he had expected. In the frozen soil was the clear impression of a horse's hoof, an imprint which must have been made when the weather was warmer and the ground damp. There was more than one, and he now followed them diagonally across the meadow to the higher land, where they were lost in the harder soil.

Keene stood near the last one discernible,

and sighted an imaginary line to the gap in the hedge.

"Now, when were those prints made?" he asked himself. "It rained hard on Monday, and up to Tuesday noon, and since Tuesday evening the ground has been frozen hard. They must have been made early Tuesday evening. Moreover, the rider was no stranger, for he rode too fast, and knew the ground and where he was going."

Again the detective sighted the gap in the hedge, and then he went on his way for appearance sake, and approached the turnpike, and later the turnpike tavern.

"So Mr. Thorpe rode up Malden way, did he?" he said to himself, smiling complacently, as he walked. "That testimony was a lie! He rode hard and fast across the meadows to a point in the turnpike, and thence to the tavern. Mr. Thorpe, I now shall drive you to the wall!"

It was nearly two o'clock when Sheridan Keene returned to the Moore dwelling. The crowd was collecting again, and it was nearly time for the inquest to be resumed. He saw nothing of Thorpe, nor of Darbage; and, on entering the house, he at once went upstairs to the room he had occupied the previous night.

When he left it, just before the inquest was to reopen, he passed the closed door of one of the chambers. It was that which Mabel Moore had occupied during her childhood and early womanhood. The sound of a voice from within caught the detective's ear, the voice of Bob Jeffrey; and Keene drew back to listen.

"Mabel," the man was saying; "yours has been a great courage and a great love! You left this home and accepted a father's curse to come to my arms and share my humbler home."

A low, half-choked sob was the only answer.

"God knows I have tried to be a good husband to you," Jeffrey went on. "If I have erred in resenting your father's conduct, it was only because I could not endure the injustice done you. For myself, I cared nothing. My resentment may have brought a great trouble to us both, possibly a great danger to me; and you may be called on to

exercise your love and courage in a far more terrible trial than any you have yet experienced. Do you know what I mean?"

"Yes, Bob!" the girl sobbed, chokingly.

"Mabel," and the man's deep voice faltered slightly; "by all the love I have for you, by the memory of my dead mother, who, if she hears me now, knows that I speak the truth, I swear that I am innocent of any act of violence against your father! Will you—can you believe that, in the face of anything that comes?"

Keene heard her kiss the lips that uttered the solemn oath, and then her tearful answer.

"Oh, Bob! my husband! can you doubt it? Let come what will, let them say and do what they may, let all the world condemn you—Bob, I will cleave the closer to you! Never till your own lips confess it will I harbor a thought that you did harm to my poor father."

"Thank God for that assurance!" cried Jeffrey, with a voice that now rang with loving pride. "Let them do their worst, now! I can face them like a man!"

Keene smiled faintly, and descended the stairs to the parlor. The jurors were already in their chairs. The crowd in the hall was increasing, and the excitement was intense. Every person present felt sure that Bob Jeffrey would be the next witness called.

He entered the parlor a few minutes after Sheridan Keene. His step was firm, his face flushed, and the quick flash of his clear, blue eyes swept defiantly over every person present. He had prevailed upon his wife to remain up-stairs.

Sheridan Keene rubbed an idea from the point of his chin, and said to himself, quite gleefully:

"That's not the same man that was here this morning!"

CHAPTER IX.

CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE.

There was increased excitement when Robert Jeffrey was called to the floor. He faced the coroner and jury with his countenance flushed with painful mortification, and a look in his eyes that was like a challenge

to every man. He felt that his past character did not merit the suspicious gaze of the many friends and neighbors who were around him, and his replies to the coroner's questions were made in tones of subdued vehemence, evincing a resentment he could only partially suppress.

The coroner began with the usual inquiries of name and birthplace, and the first half-hour was expended in ascertaining the meaning of the rash declarations of the witness at the tavern, also his motive in visiting the Moore place on the night of the crime. But nothing more of importance was evoked than has already appeared, and it became plainly evident from the doubtful expressions upon the faces of the jurors that the stand taken by Jeffrey, and the explanations he was making, were anything but satisfactory.

This had a tendency to irritate Jeffrey, and in reply to a question calculated to bring out his motive in seeking Moore that evening, he cried, in a tone of fierce exasperation:

"I suppose a man has a right to visit his father-in-law, hasn't he?"

The coroner did not resent his inquiry, other than to gently recommend calmness and as concise responses as was possible. His tone seldom varied from its cold, portentous acuteness, and his eyes were rarely turned from the pale face of the witness, other than to glance quickly at the steady-moving hand of the stenographer near by.

"Mr. Jeffrey," he continued, "did you visit the turnpike tavern early Tuesday evening?"

"Yes, sir, I did."

"At what time did you leave there?"

"It might have been half-past seven."

"You have admitted that your relations with the deceased were not of a friendly character. Do you admit coming here on the night in question?"

"Yes, sir, I do admit it," cried Jeffrey, with dogged bravado in tone and manner.

"At what time did you arrive here?"

"I don't know what time it was. I was engaged in thought. I didn't notice the time. I was exercised by the injustice that was being done my wife, and I wanted to see her father. I cannot tell what time it was."

"Did you make any stops on your way from the tavern?"

"No, I did not. I walked moderately. It might have been eight o'clock, or some after, when I came here."

"Did you come by the way of the street and approach the house by the driveway?"

"Certainly, I did!" replied Jeffrey, impetuously.

"What did you then do?" demanded the coroner, with his searching scrutiny becoming even more intent.

Jeffrey's brow lowered, and the bright red in either cheek deepened perceptibly. The nervous twitching of his lips, and the swelling veins of his forehead, indicated a terrible struggle going on within him. He was maddened by his humiliating position, and realized the terrible chasm on the brink of which he stood, and into which it seemed to be the design of one and all to drag him.

"I did what any man would have done," he answered, fiercely.

"That does not reply to my question," the coroner cried, sternly. "I want to know what you did on arriving here?"

"I went and tried the door," said Jeffrey, in a voice of sullen desperation.

Sheridan Keene, who had not taken his gaze from the face of the witness, perceived that he shrank from the next question.

"Am I to understand, then," demanded Judge Clark, forcibly, "that you came directly from the tavern to the door of this house?"

"I have replied to that effect," said Jeffrey, sullenly.

"Did you obtain admission?"

The voice of the coroner fell to its former tone, but a strange frown, not observable before, had appeared upon his brow.

"No, sir, I did not," said Robert Jeffrey, with some display of relief.

"Who came to the door?"

"Mr. Darbage."

"He refused to admit you?"

"Yes, sir. He thrust me off the steps and closed the door."

"What did you do after that?"

"I started down the driveway to go home."

"Did you go?"

"I did not. I was much wrought up in mind, and did not notice where I was going till I found myself out beyond the stable."

"Near the curve in the road?"

"Yes, sir."

"What did you do then?"

"I intended, sir, to go home, and was on the point of starting off when I was struck on the head from behind!"

The effect of this statement was thrilling. Even Sheridan Keene was for a second disconcerted.

"Struck from behind?" echoed the coroner, amazed, while every eye was glued on the witness. Keene, glancing at Mrs. Jeffrey's face, saw it turn a death-like pallor.

"What do you mean, sir?" asked Judge Clark, at last, recovering from his surprise.

Jeffrey's face was like stone as he repeated: "I was struck by some soft instrument—I do not know what."

"How do you know it was a soft instrument?" asked the coroner, incredulously.

"Because I could find no bruise on my head when I recovered consciousness."

"Did you see your assailant?"

"I did not. It came too suddenly."

By this time those present were in a fever of excitement.

Was Jeffrey speaking the truth, or was he taking a desperate course to account for his absence?

"And how long did you remain unconscious?" were the next words of the coroner.

"I did not know at the time, but I am now aware that it must have been nearly midnight."

"And have you no evidence to show that you were struck down?" asked the coroner, evidently placing little faith in the witness' words.

A look of despair crossed Jeffrey's face as he replied:

"I have none. I knew you would not believe it—I knew it. But, by Heaven!" he cried, rising in his seat, and raising his arm, "as I live, it is the truth."

For the first time the coroner showed signs of credence in his testimony.

"If you lay unconscious in the fields for several hours," he said, "would you not have been numb with the cold?"

"I was, and for a while had a raging pain in my head. But I was dressed warm, and, besides, am hardened to the cold."

As the stalwart man sat there, his eyes glowing and his ruddy cheeks warm with blood, he looked capable of defying the elements.

"Why did you not tell your wife of this?" asked the coroner.

"I knew it would only worry her, and I did not think I would have to mention it at all," answered Bob Jeffrey.

The coroner leaned back in his seat, with a deep frown on his face.

After a considerable pause, he said:

"Do you know at just what time you reached home?"

"It was just twelve o'clock."

"You seem to be accurate on that point."

"I noticed the clock in the dining-room."

"Then you had a lamp?"

"No; the light from the moon was sufficient."

"Did you at once retire to bed?"

"Yes, sir, I did."

"Had your wife already retired?"

"Yes, she had!" Jeffrey curtly answered, almost at the end of his patience.

"Mr. Jeffrey, will you please remove the shoe from your right foot and let me have it?"

Turning suddenly pale, a paleness at once followed by a blush of confusion, Robert Jeffrey stooped and removed his shoe. The jurors, wearied by long and close attention, moved restlessly, and wondered what was about to occur. On the face of Constable Bragg there gradually arose a glow of pride and triumph.

The coroner took the shoe.

"The witness," he said, with some austerity, "will remain here; the jury will please follow me."

He led the way out of doors till he stood beneath the windows of Moore's chamber, where he gravely addressed the men gathered about him.

"Here is the ground, gentlemen. You will observe where some person has been standing, with the evident intention of looking into this window. You will recall the severe storm of Monday and a part of Tuesday, and if these impressions had been here prior to that time they would have been obliterated. You may reasonably assume, then, that they must have been made Tuesday afternoon or evening, at which latter time the ground became frozen."

He stooped and placed the shoe in one of the depressions.

"You will also observe," he continued, "that this shoe exactly fits the impression. That is all here, gentlemen."

The expression upon the faces of the different jurymen was a study, as each examined in his turn; but the coroner presently led the way to the rear of the house, and there, beneath the kitchen window, was found the same damaging evidence.

"Now, gentlemen," he said, "we will return to the house."

It was several minutes before Judge Clark had resumed his seat in the parlor, and the jurors theirs. The flush had left Robert Jeffrey's face, and he stood, deathly pale, beside the chair in which he had been seated. Wiping his damp palms, he gazed from one juror to another, as if in search of one doubtful face. But one and all told in mute accents of some frightful evidence against him, the nature of which he knew only too well, and the facts concerning which he had ven-

tured to suppress. Amid an indescribable silence, the coroner resumed his inquiry.

"Mr. Jeffrey," he said, slowly, "you arrived home at midnight, I believe?"

"Yes, sir."

The response was given with but little more than a hoarse whisper.

"Mr. Jeffrey, did you ever before see this?" continued the coroner, taking from the table drawer the thin package of documents with which Mr. Bragg had provided him, after removing them from the clock in the dining-room of the witness.

Jeffrey examined the package closely, turning it over in his trembling hands, and said at length:

"Never, sir, to my knowledge."

"Is this your property?" asked the coroner, handing from a parcel near by a thick woollen reefer.

"Yes, sir; I think it is," stammered Jeffrey, with intense surprise. "It looks like one I have."

"You will observe that it is torn on the right side near the bottom, as if it had caught upon something, say the blind-catch of a window, for instance. Can you explain how that was done?"

"No, sir," faltered Jeffrey, with increasing agitation. "I did not know it was so. I have not worn it since night before last."

Judge Clark was pressing the questions very pointedly, and with one forefinger extended, as if to pierce the form of the man standing in the floor.

"On the left sleeve near the cuff, Mr. Jeffrey, you will see by close examination the marks of some dark color. Can you tell what it is?"

The garment shook visibly in Jeffrey's tremulous hands, as he turned it over and stared with strained eyes at the portion indicated. There upon the dark cloth were several stains of clotted blood.

With a cry of one suddenly enraged, Jeffrey hurled the coat to the floor, and raising his clinched hand above his head, shouted violently:

"I know nothing about it! This is some infernal scheme to incriminate me."

The coroner raised his hand warningly.

"But one question more, Mr. Jeffrey," he said. "Do you recognize this as your property?"

And he extended under the very eyes of the jury and witness a bloodstained sheath-knife with a buck-horn handle.

With face as hueless as that of the dead, Jeffrey recoiled for an instant, staring with dilated eyes at the open knife. Then he sprang impulsively forward, crying eagerly, in the wildly exultant tone of one who sees

escape from some horrible abyss into which he is falling:

"No! No! It is not mine! It is not mine! I have one like that, but mine is not broken!"

"That will do, Mr. Jeffrey."

And the witness reeled backward and resumed his chair, the perspiration reeking from every pore, his countenance bloodless, and looking twenty years older from the mental strain of the last few hours.

"Mr. Bragg," said the coroner, so sharply that the rising excitement was instantly quelled; "will you please make a statement to the jury of what you have discovered?"

It was evident that Judge Clark was bringing the inquest to a close.

The constable rose from his seat and approached the table.

"Your honor and gentlemen," he said, speaking slowly and with his usual air of wisdom, "my duty as an officer requires me to look up evidence in such cases as this. I began my work immediately upon arriving here Wednesday morning, and made those discoveries which the coroner has brought to your notice. I further thought it my duty to enter the house of Mr. Jeffrey, where I made a thorough search, and found the coat in the condition in which you see it. In looking for certain papers which had been taken from the desk of the deceased, I discovered that the tall clock in the corner of Jeffrey's dining-room had stopped, though the weight still was partly wound. In my examination, I found in that part of the case which contains the works, the package of documents for which I had been searching. On the morning following the crime I found in the laundry of this house a small piece of cloth, which evidently had been torn from the coat submitted to your examination."

Robert Jeffrey started up as if about to speak, but the coroner instantly motioned him to be seated.

"This is not a time for you to talk," he cried, quickly.

"The knife," continued Constable Bragg, "was found back of the hedge bordering the curve in the road, and handed to me. The witness has stated that he owned a knife like it, except that his was not broken. This small piece of bone, which fits in the damaged handle, was found by Mr. Jenks on the floor of the turnpike tavern, where Mr. Jeffrey had dropped the knife at the time of his altercation with Joe Darbage."

As if his last hope was instantly bereft him, Jeffrey uttered a groan and bowed his head in his hands, as one might who is crushed by the weight of a burden, despite that it had been expected.

As the constable drew back toward his chair, and the coroner rose to address the jury, Sheridan Keene started up and left the room.

"Let me pass," he said, in a low, severe tone to the people who blocked the way at the door.

He at once went up-stairs and rapped upon the door of the room in which he earlier had heard Mabel Jeffrey talking to her husband. As he had expected, she now answered his summons.

"Mrs. Jeffrey," he said, softly; "I want you to answer two or three questions."

"Certainly, Mr. Keene," she replied, looking at him with surprise.

"Be very careful to be accurate," said Keene, earnestly. "When did you last wind the tall clock in your dining-room?"

"Last Sunday, sir," she answered, looking at him with wondering eyes.

"Can you tell at precisely what hour you set it?"

"At twelve noon, sir. I always wind that clock Sunday noon, and set it by the time on the church spire. The clock runs just a week."

"Did you wind the weight entirely up?"

"Yes, sir, I did. I am always sure to do that, or the clock would not run out the week."

"And you are sure you set it at precisely noon last Sunday?"

"I am absolutely positive of that, in regard to last Sunday, for the village clock struck the hour as I was winding up the weight, and I remarked to my husband, who was in the room, that I should not be obliged to look from the window to consult the village time."

"Are there two weights to the clock, Mrs. Jeffrey?"

"No, sir; the striking weight was removed during Mrs. Jeffrey's illness some time ago, and has never been replaced."

"Very good," smiled Keene, replacing in his pocket a notebook which he had previously consulted. "I expect to go to town presently, Mrs. Jeffrey," he added; "and may not see you again."

"Is the inquest ended?" asked Mabel, with a look of fear in her eyes.

"No, but it soon will be!" said Sheridan Keene, in a curious tone. "I shall go to town immediately after. I will shake hands with you now, as I may not see you again."

CHAPTER X.

UNDER THE SURFACE.

Sheridan Keene at once returned to the parlor. The coroner was still addressing

the jury, but he turned when the detective entered, and almost immediately concluded his remarks. The effect of the inquest was apparent in the face of nearly every person in the room. Of the entire gathering there was hardly a man who doubted that Robert Jeffrey was guilty of having murdered Jacob Moore the previous Tuesday night.

Sheridan Keene resumed his seat near the table, and the coroner drew his own chair nearer that of the detective. A subdued conference ensued between the two, during which the great crowd in the room and about the doors watched them with curious gaze, and wondered what it all was about. Yet scarce a sound broke the impressive silence.

Richard Thorpe still maintained his outward composure, and, though some of the color had vanished from his face, he appeared to take only that same cursory interest in the proceedings. To the bowed man a few feet away, a man crushed, despite himself, by the awful calamity befallen him, Thorpe gave not the slightest attention.

Presently the voice of the coroner again broke the silence.

"As I observed in the beginning," he said, gravely, with his gaze reverting to the jury, "the object of this inquest is to discover the facts bearing upon the crime, and that mere methods are of secondary importance. In the interests of justice, and of all concerned, I shall grant the solicitor of the deceased the privilege of asking a few questions. Mr. French, who is the witness?"

The lawyer, who appeared a little doubtful and perplexed, turned and replied, gravely:

"My assistant, Mr. Keene, is here. Will you kindly give the privilege to him?"

The coroner looked inquiringly at the detective.

"I would like to ask Mr. Thorpe a few questions, sir," said Sheridan Keene, "if that gentleman has no objections."

"None at all," called Richard Thorpe, who immediately came forward.

But many there noticed and remarked it later that he was unusually pale and his knees trembled.

With an expression of grave austerity on his attractive face, Sheridan Keene rose to his feet and remained standing beside the coroner's table. Every eye in the room was upon him, but his were fixed upon the face of Richard Thorpe.

"I wish merely to verify, for my own satisfaction, some of the testimony which you have given," he said, in a slow, effective way. "No doubt you can help me."

"I will do so, if I can," Thorpe answered;

yet he evaded the eyes that were so steadily searching his.

"I understand from Jenks, of the turnpike tavern, that you occasionally talked with Mr. Darbage when he at first appeared there. Is that true?"

"I think so," was the reply, after a moment. "I have a faint recollection of seeing him there about a year ago."

"That was about the time your uncle wanted you to marry Mabel Moore, was it not?"

"Yes," exclaimed Thorpe, with a change of countenance. "But what has that to do with this affair?"

"I don't imply that it has anything to do with it," replied Keene, shortly. "But it establishes the time when Darbage first appeared in this locality. Of course you, Mr. Thorpe, had no previous acquaintance with Darbage?"

"Certainly not," cried Thorpe, resentfully; but the expression upon his face was drawing the attention of all present.

"Did you in any way influence Mr. Moore to employ Darbage?"

"No, I did not! Your questions have the nature of insinuations, sir."

"Pray don't misconstrue them," said Keene. "That might operate to your disadvantage. I am trying to establish absolute facts."

"Well, don't imply that I knew Darbage before he came here, for I did not."

If Sheridan Keene was seeking to disturb the witness and perhaps confuse him, he was succeeding admirably.

"I don't say you did know him," Keene went on. "He was here most of Tuesday evening, however, as he just testified. Don't you think, Mr. Thorpe, that it is a curious fact that the person who called on Jacob Moore, if the facts are as Mrs. Haynie testified, was so careful as to secure the damaged latch of the door on leaving Moore's chamber?"

"What do you imply by that?" replied Thorpe, with a sneer.

"Merely this—if the criminal was not as careful as I suggest, then Moore might have been killed before Mrs. Haynie closed the door. That is all."

"And that is all very significant," cried Thorpe, who was trembling visibly. "But I don't care to have remarks of this kind addressed directly to me, sir. I am here to answer questions, if you have any to ask, not to be made the subject of insinuating observations."

Keene's voice fell lower, and became somewhat severe

"I will confine myself to questions, in that

case, Mr. Thorpe," he rejoined, in a way that startled all observers. "You testified that your horse was ill for a week previous to Moore's death. Was she in the stable here, or in Boston?"

"She was here."

"And had not been out for a week?"

"No."

"You are positive of that?"

"Of course I am. She was too sick to be ridden."

"Too sick to have left the stable?"

"Yes, yes! why do you press me with these questions?" demanded Thorpe, with increased impatience.

"Because you rode her on the night in question," Keene said, shortly.

"That was the only time in a week. She had improved, and needed exercise."

"So you rode up to Malden and thence to the tavern."

"I have testified to that."

"May not some other person have ridden your horse during the week?"

"I allow no other person to ride her, sir."

"Then you are positive that she was ridden only by yourself, and at the time stated, sir? I have here a copy of the shoe now on your horse," cried Sheridan Keene, with forceful rapidity. "Through a gap in the hedge, and over meadows below here, I find corresponding imprints in the soil. Evidently your horse was ridden straight from here to the tavern. How do you explain that?"

It would be impossible to describe the excitement from that moment until the culminating tragedy of that sensational afternoon.

Thorpe reeled as if he had been struck a blow, and Bob Jeffrey rose from his chair. But the coroner brought his clinched hand down upon the table, and checked all interruptions.

"The impressions in the soil may have been made at some previous time," cried Thorpe, shaking with fear, and now seeing only too plainly the purpose of his relentless questioner.

"Not so!" cried Keene, forcibly. "For the storm of Tuesday would have destroyed them, as the coroner has stated in a similar instance."

"I don't know, then!" Thorpe cried, desperately. "I don't know when they were made! I don't know when——"

"Well, never mind, then, just now," Keene said, sharply. "There is one other matter upon which I wish to be enlightened. You testified that it was precisely eight o'clock when you called at the house of Mrs. Jeffrey."

"And so it was!" cried Thorpe, with his

gray lips twitching convulsively. "So it was, precisely eight o'clock."

"Mr. Thorpe," and Sheridan Keene drew himself up with added sternness; "Mabel Jeffrey set her dining-room clock at noon Sunday last. I have been there and examined the timepiece. The clock stopped, or it was stopped, when the obstruction was introduced among the works. The hands on the dial pointed to the hour of twelve. The weight operating the mechanism was still partially wound."

"Well, what's all that to me?" cried Thorpe, scarcely able to govern his voice.

Sheridan Keene continued, without a change in tone or manner.

"Mr. Thorpe, on the woodwork I marked the exact position of the weight which runs the hands. I then wound the clock, removed the pendulum, and permitted the weight to fall. Mr. Thorpe, when the weight had reached the mark which I had made, what time should it had been by the dial?"

Thorpe hesitated for an instant, and then exclaimed, hoarsely:

"It should have been twelve o'clock!"

"It was exactly eight o'clock, Mr. Thorpe," said Keene, with terrible significance.

A half-suppressed cry of fury came from Thorpe's lips, and he sprang forward with both hands extended.

"What do you mean! What do you mean, that you dare——"

"I mean that I have established the man and the hour! I mean——"

"Who are you! Who are you, that you come here as a lawyer, yet now accuse——"

"You have accused yourself, Richard Thorpe!" thundered Keene, with indescribable severity. "I am not a lawyer! I am Sheridan Keene, of the Boston inspectors—and you are the man who murdered Jacob Moore!"

Amid the frightful excitement that followed, some saw Richard Thorpe wildly fumbling in the pocket of his vest, and then thrust something between his lips. The next instant he fell like a log to the floor, at the very feet of the man whom he had aimed to ruin, and the one man who had read him aright.

Bob Jeffrey started up with face transfigured.

"Good God!" he cried. "The man has killed himself!"

"Cyanide of potassium!" exclaimed Detective Keene, bending over the prostrate form on the floor, and instantly detecting the pungent odor of the fatal drug.

"Ah, well, Jeffrey," he added, looking up, "he has saved the sheriff a disagreeable job."

CHAPTER XI.

CONCLUSION.

"No, Chief Watts, it was not a very blind case," said Detective Keene, a few days later, as he sat alone with the chief inspector, to whom he had reported all of the particulars.

"The very nature of the crime, and the peculiar circumstances under which it had been committed, were very significant," he continued. "It looked from the first as if Thorpe had taken advantage of Jeffrey's outspoken resentment, and of Moore's antipathy, to commit the deed and then involve Mabel's innocent husband in the crime."

"I see."

"If that were so, it became only a matter of sifting down the actual circumstances, and placing the guilt where it belonged."

"Not always an easy task, Keene," smiled Chief Watts, with a nod.

"No, not always, Chief. But in this case I had considerable help of a superficial kind, from Constable Bragg. He is a hustler, that Bragg, and by following him about closely, I secured most of the naked evidence. But," added Keene, laughing, "he has no head for going below the surface of things."

"Evidently not."

"I seized upon the evidence he unearthed, however, and soon had the ribbons well in hand. It then became only a matter of suddenly driving Thorpe into such a corner that he would betray himself, which was not a very difficult task."

"Do you know if he had learned about the will Moore had made?" asked the Chief.

"Yes, he had," nodded Sheridan Keene. "Now that he is under arrest, Darbage states that Thorpe had heard Moore muttering about the will, when he believed himself to be alone, and that Thorpe then resolved to do away with him before anything should occur to alter Moore's intentions. He knew the latter could not be persuaded to forgive his daughter, unless, possibly, when on his death-bed, so Thorpe struck while the situation was in his favor."

"And the property."

"Now goes legally to Mabel Jeffrey."

"I see. Who is this man Darbage? Do you know?"

"Not yet, Chief Watts, but I think it will appear later. We easily can convict him of having been an accessory in the crime."

"Oh, no doubt of it."

"According to Darbage," continued the detective, "it seems that Thorpe ran across him here in town, and sent him down to the tavern until he could plan to have him employed at Moore's, where he wanted him in the capacity of a spy. This occurred about

the time Moore was trying to effect the marriage, and Thorpe, who was in town much of the time, desired to ascertain Mabel's precise feelings, and just what chances he could safely take to secure Moore's favor. He found he could safely agree to marry the girl, and, when she peremptorily refused to consider the project, it resulted in Moore's disowning her—the very thing for which Thorpe had hoped."

Chief Watts nodded understandingly.

"On the night Darbage came to blows with Jeffrey at the tavern, when the latter drew his knife, Darbage noticed where he replaced it, and later secured it unobserved. When Thorpe was told of the fact, he took the knife himself."

"Very cunning! He already was planning the crime."

"Not a doubt of it."

"Just how was it wrought out?"

"Oh, it was very well done, Chief Watts, as Darbage states it. On the night of the crime Thorpe mounted his horse and rode away from the house. He already knew that Mrs. Haynie was going away for a time, and probably he laid all his plans accordingly. The involving of Jeffrey, however, was not included in them at that time, and resulted purely from accident."

"Naturally," bowed Chief Watts.

"A short time after riding away, and after Mrs. Haynie had departed, Thorpe returned to the house, and secured his horse outside the stable."

"This is what Darbage tells?" inquired the Chief.

"And I am inclined to think it is the truth," replied Sheridan Keene, who had questioned the groom closely since his imprisonment. "Thorpe," he continued, "then entered the house and went to Moore's chamber, where he made a request for money, despite that Moore was then in bed. An altercation ensued, part of which Darbage overheard from the kitchen. Startled by a cry for help, Darbage ran up-stairs, and found Moore bleeding in bed, stabbed as stated. Within a few minutes he was dead."

"A terrible affair, indeed."

"Darbage states that his first impulse was to reveal the whole truth, but, by the promise of money, Thorpe bought him to secrecy, and together they set to work to devise some scheme for averting suspicion."

"They did pretty well, at that, in the limited time they had," smiled Chief Watts.

"So they did," assented the detective. "It was the groom's idea, that of secreting the documents in Jeffrey's house, that were taken from Moore's desk."

"It strikes me that Jeffrey selected a

strange place in which to hide them," observed Chief Watts.

"In the clock! Yes, it was strange in a way; but he was compelled to accomplish his object when Mabel was not present, and he took the opportunity when she went to the door with Mrs. Haynie. His object being to throw suspicion upon Jeffrey, he slipped the package into the upper part of the tall case, that part containing the works. He then stopped the clock, setting the hands at twelve, probably thinking it would be assumed that Jeffrey had returned subsequent to his own visit, and that the obstruction was placed there by him, and had stopped the clock. The scheme would have worked against such a man as Bragg, but not against your humble servant," laughed Sheridan Keene.

Chief Watts smiled, approvingly.

"Don't you think Thorpe took rather a long chance?" he asked, quietly. "Suppose Mrs. Jeffrey were to have noticed that the clock had stopped before her husband returned?"

"Ah, but Thorpe made sure that that would not be likely to occur. He took the woman into the sitting-room, after Mrs. Haynie's departure, and later suggested that they should go out and seek for her husband.

"Furthermore, had Mrs. Jeffrey noticed the time, on her return, she would have assumed that the clock had accidentally stopped, and merely would have started it again, without making an examination of the works. In any case, you see, the package was bound to be found there, and naturally would incriminate the man intended."

"But for the discernment of a clever officer," smiled the Chief. "What was Darbage doing, meantime?"

"He saw Jeffrey outside the house, and took advantage of the circumstances," Keene explained.

"Having extinguished the light in the fatal room, he watched Jeffrey attempt to look into the window, and also heard him enter the kitchen. Evidently Jeffrey suspected Moore was alone, and was at intervals determined to see him. When he finally tried the front door, Darbage made his own presence known, and took occasion to moisten his hand with the blood of the dead man, and to stain Jeffrey's coat sleeve with it, when he thrust him from the steps."

"Ah, I see!"

"Then Darbage, who is an artful dog, fixed things to involve Jeffrey. He followed him out beyond the barn and struck him with a slung-shot, with the intention of detaining him near the house so that he would come under suspicion. Then he tossed away the knife Thorpe had used, where it was likely to be found, and went to the tavern. Next morning he and Thorpe had their infamous design well in mind, and there's the case in a nutshell."

Chief Watts bowed gravely, and consulted his watch.

"It was one of those tragedies which at times result from family dissension," he observed, gravely. "I am glad that Jeffrey and his wife get what belongs to them; and that, for the sake of one man, you were successful in your efforts."

"What man is that, Chief Watts?"

"Lawyer French, who requested me to loan him a competent officer. He now thinks there is no detective who is the peer of Sheridan Keene. Don't blush, Inspector Keene! He is more than half right."

THE END.

Another apparently baffling case of extraordinary interest will appear in next week's SHIELD WEEKLY (No. 6) entitled, "Who Was the Model? or, Missing: A Beautiful Heiress."

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